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Agenda Item 18c

WaterWorld



Photo by Karolina Grabowska from Pexels

WATER UTILITY MANAGEMENT

# Historic CA water district merger becomes official

Byron-Bethany Irrigation District (BBID) consolidates with West Side Irrigation District (WSID).

Oct 2nd, 2020

**BYRON, CA** -- Two century-old irrigation districts in the Tracy area have officially joined forces. In a landmark moment Tuesday, the Byron-Bethany Irrigation District (BBID) held its first regular board meeting since consolidating with the West Side Irrigation District (WSID).

In the early 1900s, the two districts kept handwritten

board meeting minutes. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held virtually via Zoom.

“This is the culmination of several years of work to bring these two districts together, for the benefit of our growers,” said BBID General Manager Rick Gilmore. “In today’s challenging regulatory climate, this consolidation will improve water reliability, strengthen water rights, and provide greater financial flexibility to keep our water system performing well into the future.”

In June, the San Joaquin Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) voted unanimously in favor of consolidating the districts. The former 6,000-acre WSID service area West of Tracy was incorporated into the existing 30,000-acre service area of BBID, establishing a single 36,000-acre district. Former WSID Directors Tom Pereira and Jack Alvarez have become BBID Board Directors in newly created Divisions XIII and IX, respectively. The former boundaries of WSID are now known as the West Side Service Area. All former WSID employees have become BBID staff.

“This is a great step forward that will keep our farmers in business,” said Jack Alvarez, former WSID Board President and new BBID Board Director. “We are stronger together, with a greater ability to manage costs and provide reliable water deliveries.”

The merger has been in the works since 2016, when both districts first voted to move forward and BBID began managing WSID operations. Landowners expressed their strong support at a public meeting held at the outset of the process. Last year, LAFCO adopted a final Municipal Service Review (MSR) and Sphere of Influence (SOI) prepared by both districts, which includes an extensive review of financial information, infrastructure, and services provided.

BBID previously merged with the Plain View Water District in 2004.

Byron-Bethany Irrigation District (BBID) is a multi-county special district serving parts of Alameda, Contra

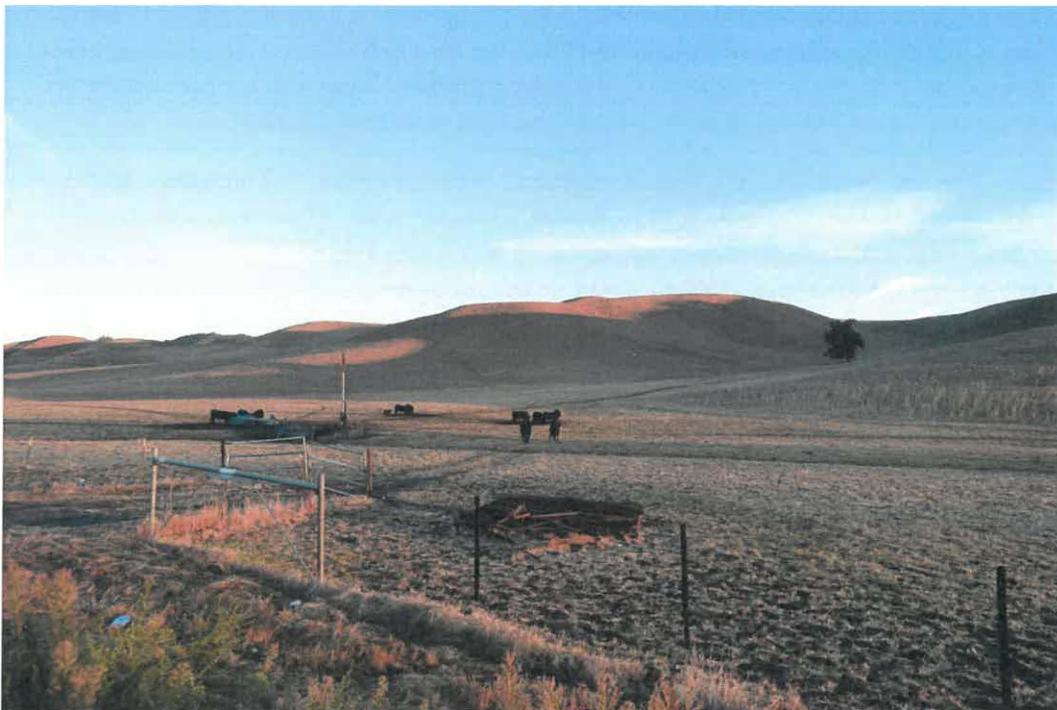
Costa, and San Joaquin Counties across 55 square miles and 36,000 acres. The district serves more than 215 agricultural customers and more than 20,000 residents of the Mountain House community.

**Source URL:** <https://www.waterworld.com/water-utility-management/press-release/14184598/historic-ca-water-district-merger-becomes-official>

OPINION > COMMENTARY

## Opinion: Contra Costa growth boundary threatened by development plan

Proposed Tassajara deal includes proposed \$6.5 million payoff to county to bust voter-approved Urban Limit Line



Undeveloped land is seen in Contra Costa County near Danville in 2016. The Contra Costa Board of Supervisors might soon decide whether to approve a new housing project in the Tassajara Valley. (Kristopher Skinner/Bay Area News Group)

By **RICHARD FISCHER** and **GRETCHEN LOGUE** |

PUBLISHED: September 27, 2020 at 6:10 a.m. | **UPDATED: September 27, 2020 at 6:21 a.m.**



Contra Costa County's Urban Limit Line has successfully defended against unrestrained urban sprawl over most of the last two decades. It has saved the remarkable and beautiful land of the county from overdevelopment, allowing for agriculture and open space for the enjoyment of residents.

When voters adopted the ULL, it provided significant protections. The terms required a countywide vote for housing developments outside the ULL that exceeded 30 acres in size. However, it did provide a mechanism whereby a development of 30 acres or less could be approved without a countywide vote. Such a development could be approved by a vote of four of the five members of the county Board of Supervisors and a finding of at least one of seven narrowly restrictive exceptions.

Today, such a proposed 30-acre exception is before the county's Planning Commission on Wednesday and may soon go to the Board of Supervisors for approval. It doesn't meet any of the seven exceptions, and it should be rejected.

In the history of the ULL, there has only been one such 30-acre approval granted by the county. The Bay Point Waterfront project moved approximately 21 acres of undeveloped open space and commercial recreation lands inside the ULL in exchange for moving 22 acres of regional parkland outside the ULL. Approval for the change was possible because the board used one of the exceptions, that the change would more accurately reflect topographical characteristics or legal boundaries.

The project under consideration today for approval is known as Tassajara Parks. The project's sponsor has claimed that by dedicating a substantial amount of acreage for park usage it would qualify for an exemption known as an "Agricultural Preservation Agreement." However, the area is already preserved because the ULL prevents urban development. An analogy might be helpful. One needs a pair of shoes to protect the feet. Adding another pair of shoes on top of the existing shoes does not add needed protection.

County voters who overwhelmingly approved the adoption of the ULL wanted strict protections against sprawl. The ULL is subject to review every five years and adjustments made if the county determines it needs to provide more space for housing and job growth. In fact, such a review was conducted in November 2016, and it concluded that the county had enough developable land within the ULL to last until 2036. Since developable land exists within the ULL and there is no valid exception for approval of Tassajara Parks outside the ULL, the county should reject it.

In the Final Environmental Impact Report prepared by the county's Conservation and Development Department, it reported that the project's sponsor will dedicate land for park usage and write a check for \$6.5 million to a county fund, an increase of \$2.5 million over the offer made in 2016. If this methodology results in approval, future developers could use this sort of payoff as a blueprint for future 30-acre developments — dedicate some land and write a large enough check to the county. These developments could be coming to previously reserved open space near you.

The Tassajara Valley Preservation Association has been an advocate for controlled growth that follows the rule of law. We know that all of us believe in fair play and trust that our government officials follow the letter and spirit of our laws. Time is short. Please join us and over 3,600 county residents who have signed a petition to our county supervisors to protect our ULL. More information can be seen on our organization's website, [Tassajaravalley.org](http://Tassajaravalley.org).

*Richard Fischer and Gretchen Logue are founders of the Tassajara Valley Preservation Association and longtime residents of the Tassajara Valley.*

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# Medical emergency cancels meeting on housing development in Pittsburg

Seeno, Discovery Builders were looking for approval Monday on plans for housing in southwest hills



The Faria/Southwest Hills project would build up to 1,500 in the hills above and beyond the former Concord Naval Weapons Station.

By **JUDITH PRIEVE** | [jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com) | Bay Area News Group  
PUBLISHED: August 24, 2020 at 5:06 p.m. | UPDATED: August 25, 2020 at 5:19 a.m.

A meeting to consider the Seeno Faria/Southwest Hills Annexation Project just outside Pittsburg was abruptly canceled on Monday.

The special meeting, set for 5 p.m. Monday, was called to approve up to 1,500 homes that Albert Seeno III and the family's Concord-based Discovery Builders hope to build in the southwest hills. An initial notice said the meeting was canceled because of "a medical emergency," though no specifics were given. No new date for the meeting was given.

In late July, the Planning Commission on a 3-2 vote agreed to recommend the project for approval, and the City Council was set to give final approval on Monday.

East Bay Regional Parks, Save Mount Diablo and other groups, however, have opposed the plans to build on the hills southwest of Pittsburg, and dozens sent letters of opposition on the project.



Part of San Marcos rolling green hills in where the Faria/Southwest Hills would include up to 1,500 homes in Pittsburg, Calif., on Monday, March 23, 2017. Photo by Tom Pollard/Bay Area News Group

Seeno/Discovery Builders had asked for approval of its environmental impact documents, a development agreement and an amendment to the city's general plan that would allow construction on the hillsides. Plans call for development on 341 acres with another 265 acres for open space.

If OK'd by the Pittsburg City Council, the developer would still need to seek approval from the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to annex the project before it could be built.

For more information on Pittsburg development plans, go to <http://www.ci.pittsburg.ca.us/>

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Judith Prieve is an East Bay journalist. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she has worked as a reporter, features editor and assistant metro editor at newspapers in Wisconsin and Northern California and has been at what is now the Bay Area News Group for more than 25 years.

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# Seeno, Discovery Builders sue East Bay Park District over new park plans



Lawsuit suggests new Concord park will cause blight, have impact on environment



A lawsuit has been filed on behalf of Concord-based developer Albert Seeno III against the East Bay Regional Parks District, which hopes to build a new park at the former Concord Naval Weapons Station. Seeno hopes to build homes on the Pittsburg hills overlooking where the park would be located.

By **JUDITH PRIEVE** | [jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com) | Bay Area News Group

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Concord-based developer Albert Seeno III and Discovery Builders have filed suit against the East Bay Regional Park District, which could impact its plans to develop a new regional park at the former Concord Naval Weapons Station.

The action came shortly before the developer and Faria Land Investors were to ask the Pittsburg City Council to approve its master plan, environmental documents and development agreement to build up to 1,500 homes in the hills southwest of Pittsburg. That virtual meeting was set for Monday but abruptly canceled due to an undisclosed medical reason. It will be rescheduled, city officials said.

Late last month Pittsburg's Planning Commission voted 4-3 to recommend that the City Council approve the Faria project, which sits above and to the east of the planned new Concord park. As part of the deal, Seeno promises to build a recreation center in Pittsburg.

The developers' lawsuit alleges that the planned Concord Hills Regional Park would cause undisclosed impacts on the environment and would impact their planned residential development on a 606-acre Faria parcel adjacent to the ridgeline of the park.



A decades-long effort to secure part of the former Concord Naval Weapons Station for the creation of a park reached a major milestone in 2019 when East Bay Regional Park District Board of Directors approved accepting 2,216 acres of former weapons station land. The park will include miles of trails, campgrounds, and a visitor center. (Steven Joseph/East Bay Regional Parks District)

Nearly 2,216 acres were transferred to the district to create a new regional park in partnership with the National Park Service in 2019. The property is between Kirker Pass Road and Highway 4.

The park's land-use plan and associated environmental impact report, meanwhile, were approved on July 7 for the eastern Concord site, paving the way for the Park District to begin work on the development of the more than 2,540-acre regional park at the former Concord Naval Weapons Station.

The park project is the product of years of community advocacy and partnership among the Park District, U.S. Navy, National Park Service and the city of Concord.

"This is the true culmination of a decades-long community effort," Beverly Lane, who has represented Concord on the East Bay Regional Park District Board since 1994, wrote in a statement. "I'm proud to be part of the Park District and its effort to produce a truly fabulous plan for a new Regional Park in the Diablo Valley."

Plans call for public access for recreation, permanent preservation of the land as natural habitat, and a joint visitor center with the National Park Service.

"The public overwhelmingly supports the creation of this regional park," EBRPD General Manager Robert Doyle said. "Seeno Company never expressed any specific concerns or opposition to the new park during the two-decades-long planning process...until now, after the land use plan has been approved."

Seeno could not be reached for comment.

The park district in turn has opposed the proposed Faria development in the Pittsburg hills but the Planning Commission gave its nod of approval after hundreds of public comments late last month.

Plans to develop the hills date back to 2005 when voter-approved Measure P moved the Faria land site within Pittsburg's urban boundary. The city approved an agreement with Seeno that established guidelines for a permanent greenbelt buffer along the inner edges of the boundary.

If OK'd by the Pittsburg City Council, the developer would still need to seek approval from the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to annex the project before it could be built.

For more information on Pittsburg development plans, go to <http://www.ci.pittsburg.ca.us/>

