

ANTIOCH

**By Chris Campos**

*Bay City News Foundation*

The Antioch City Council has approved the hiring of Cornelius Johnson, a retired San Francisco police captain, as interim city manager for a oneyear contract.

Johnson will become the first Black city manager in the city's history. Johnson also served as Mayor Lamar Thorpe's campaign manager in his successful election.

Johnson has no city administrative

management experience. He earned a bachelor's degree in public administration and a master's degree in public administration from the University of San Francisco.

Thorpe, calling from a conference in the Dominican Republic, said Wednesday, "The city made history last night. I'm pretty excited."

Ron Bernal, the current city manager, has announced he will retire at the

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end of this year. Earlier this year, the city's Police Chief Tammany Brooks resigned to take a position in Idaho. The 3-2 vote Nov. 9 once again followed a tense split between the three Black members and the two dissenting white colleagues.

Councilmember Michael Barbanica pleaded with his colleagues to put off the vote. "This is premature," he said while emphasizing his friendship with Johnson and their common background in law enforcement. "We have rushed this."

One public comment said, "This smells like quid pro quo."

Councilmember Lori Ogorchock also wanted to put the hiring on hold

and joined Barbanica in voting no on the appointment.

Thorpe said that he hopes Johnson can serve as a "bridge" between Bernal's retirement and the search for a permanent city manager. Most of the council members indicated support for hiring a national search firm. Johnson will be paid \$20,137 a month.

# **\$1 billion project to expand major Bay Area reservoir gains momentum**

## **Plans moving forward to enlarge Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Contra Costa County by 72%**



BRENTWOOD, CALIF. — NOV. 8 : View of Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Brentwood, Calif., on Monday, Nov. 8, 2021. The Contra Costa Water District is working with other Bay Area water agencies to expand the region's water supply, is moving forward with a \$1 billion plan to significantly expand the reservoir by raising the height of its dam. Currently the dam is at 231 feet and plan to raise it to 287 feet. (Jose Carlos Fajardo/Bay Area News Group)

The rolling hills and ranchlands of eastern Contra Costa County are known for wineries, cattle ranches, wind turbines and growing subdivisions.

But soon they may be known for something else: The biggest new water storage project in the Bay Area in years. And now, amid the current drought, nearly every major water agency in the region wants a piece of it.

The Contra Costa Water District is moving closer to breaking ground on plans to expand Los Vaqueros Reservoir, south of Brentwood, by raising the reservoir's earthen dam by 56 feet, to 287 feet high. That would make it the second tallest dam in the Bay Area, eclipsed only by Warm Springs Dam on Lake Sonoma near Healdsburg, which is 319 feet high.

Construction, slated to begin in late 2023 and finish by 2030, would expand Los Vaqueros from its current 160,000 acre-feet capacity to 275,000 acre-feet, enough water when full for the annual needs of 1.4 million people.

At a time when other efforts to build new dams and reservoirs in California have struggled for lack of money, ballooning costs and opposition from environmental groups, Los Vaqueros is gaining momentum. The idea is that part of the \$1 billion cost would be shared by other Bay Area water agencies, who would receive some of the water. “It’s about water supply reliability,” said Marguerite Patil, assistant general manager of Contra Costa Water District. “It’s not a big enough project to solve everybody’s problems, but it’s a good tool to have in the tool kit.”



BRENTWOOD, CALIF. – NOV. 8 : Contra Costa Water District assistant general manager Marguerite Patil, left, and Contra Costa Water District engineering manager Chris Hentz are photographed near the spillway of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Brentwood, Calif., on Monday, Nov. 8, 2021. (Jose Carlos Fajardo/Bay Area News Group)

Recently, the project has cleared [several significant hurdles](#).

Last month, the Contra Costa Water District and seven other agencies formed a legal partnership to oversee the design, construction and funding of the reservoir — including negotiating in the coming year how much money each agency will contribute and how much water they will secure.

That partnership, called a Joint Powers Authority, held its [first public meeting Wednesday](#).

Environmental studies are finished. Engineering plans are expected to be reviewed in the spring by state dam safety officials for final approval.

Two weeks ago, the California Water Commission, a nine-member agency appointed by the governor, voted unanimously to confirm that the project qualifies to receive \$470 million from Proposition 1, a state water bond passed by voters in 2014.

The project also has \$223 million in federal funds. The rest of the funding would come from other Bay Area water agencies.

“We’re feeling great,” Patil said.

There are still challenges ahead. To raise the dam, the reservoir will have to be drained in 2027 for three years. The district says it will provide water during that time to Contra Costa County residents directly from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and from transfers and exchanges with other districts.

Los Vaqueros Reservoir is 3 miles long. It was built in 1998, paid for by the customers of the Contra Costa Water District. In 2010, the same customers approved an advisory measure to expand the reservoir from 100,000 acre-feet to 160,000 acre-feet, by raising the dam 34 feet. That project was finished in 2012. The reservoir, now 63% full, has reduced the impact of the last two droughts on Contra Costa County residents.

Of note: The project has never been opposed by environmental groups. Part of the reason is that Los Vaqueros is an off-stream reservoir, filled from the Delta, rather than a dam on a free-flowing river.

“They reached out early on to understand our concerns,” said Jonas Minton, senior water advisor to the Planning and Conservation League, a Sacramento environmental group. “They incorporated ways to reduce environmental impacts.”

Among those were putting in state-of-the-art fish screens on Delta intake pipes to reduce harm to fish, building a 55-mile network of public trails around the reservoir, and in the new expansion, guaranteeing some water will go to Central Valley wildlife refuges.

A decade ago, plans to expand the reservoir were discussed, but the economy was struggling and Contra Costa officials couldn’t find other agencies to help foot the bill.

## RESERVOIR EXPANSION PROPOSAL

A \$1 billion project could expand Los Vaqueros Reservoir and connect it with other water systems as far south as San Jose.



Source: Contra Costa Water District

BAY AREA NEWS GROUP



Now the partnership is a who's-who of Bay Area water leaders: The Contra Costa Water District, Alameda County Water District, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Santa Clara Valley Water District, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, and Zone 7 Water Agency in Livermore, along with the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority, and Grassland Water District in Los Banos.

To the south, the Santa Clara Valley Water District has proposed building a major new reservoir in southern Santa Clara County near Pacheco Pass. But its costs doubled to \$2.5 billion this year when the site was found to have unstable geology. It has no local funding partners so far. Environmentalists and San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo are opposed. Pacheco Reservoir is still being planned, but the district, based in San Jose, is studying other ideas also.

“Los Vaqueros has a lot of merit,” said Tony Estremera, chairman of the Santa Clara Valley Water District, which serves 2 million people. “We are looking really hard to solve our storage problems. This is one of the best options we’ve found.”

The region’s largest water agency, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, which runs the Hetch Hetchy system for 2.7 million people in four counties, also is at the table.

“We still have questions about how much water we can get and how much it will cost us,” said Steve Ritchie, the commission’s assistant general manager.

Ritchie said Los Vaqueros is one of 15 projects San Francisco is considering — including raising its own Calaveras Dam east of Fremont and expanding recycled water — to help reduce water shortages over the next 50 years as the population grows and the city battles state regulators and environmentalists over how much water it can take from the Tuolumne River.

“Reservoirs are really hard to build,” Ritchie said. “They are expensive. The idea of being part of a project where new storage is actually being built, having that in the future, is a fairly tempting proposition. These opportunities don’t come along very often.”



BRENTWOOD, CALIF. – NOV. 8 : Fisherman Nick Nakano, of Oakley, hikes back to his car after spending the morning fishing at Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Brentwood, Calif., on Monday, Nov. 8, 2021. (Jose Carlos Fajardo/Bay Area News Group)

**DROUGHT**

# Water proposal resulting in rancor

Measure signature  
gathering underway

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**By Paul Rogers**

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California has not built enough new reservoirs, desalination plants and other water projects because there are too many delays, too many lawsuits and too much red tape.

That's the message from a growing coalition of Central Valley farmers and Southern California desalination supporters who have begun collecting signatures for a statewide ballot measure that would fast-track big water projects and provide billions of dollars to fund them, potentially setting up a major political showdown with environmentalists next year shaped by the state's ongoing

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# Water

FROM PAGE 1

ing drought.

The measure, known as the "Water Infrastructure Funding Act of 2022," needs 997,132 signatures of registered voters by April 29 to qualify for the November 2022 statewide ballot.

If approved by a majority of voters, it would require that 2% of California's general fund — about \$4 billion a year — be set aside for projects to expand water supplies. Those could include new dams and reservoirs, desalination plants, recycled water plants and other projects like upgrading canals and pipes.

The money would continue flowing each year until 5 million acre-feet of new water supply was created, an increase of about 13% in the roughly 39 million acre-feet used in an average year by all the state's residents, farmers and businesses. That could take several decades and cost \$100 billion,

according to an analysis by the non-partisan State Legislative Analyst's Office.

"We think conservation has an important role to play," said Edward Ring, a spokesman for the campaign, known as More Water Now. "But you can't get there any more just with conservation. If you want to be resilient against a prolonged drought, you have to have new supplies."

Supporters say California hasn't kept pace expanding its water supplies, leading to severe shortages for farmers in recent years and likely water rationing next year for many urban residents if the state's two-year drought continues.

With climate change, they note, scientists say California's droughts are becoming more severe. The state needs more reservoirs to save water in wet years, they say, particularly as hotter temperatures melt the Sierra Nevada snowpack.

"When we have big storm events, there is surplus water and we need to harvest it," Ring said.

The measure has been endorsed by 27 state lawmakers, including 18 Republicans, one independent and eight Democrats, including one from the Bay Area, Assemblyman Tim Grayson, D-Concord.

Environmentalists, however, say the measure goes too far, and are preparing to fight it.

"For next November's ballot, this is the Number 1 priority of environmental groups," said Jonas Minton, a senior water adviser to the Planning and Conservation League, a Sacramento nonprofit. "That's due to the destruction to California's environment that would result from the unsupervised spending of billions of dollars each year without environmental oversight."

Under the measure, the money would be spent each year by the California Water Commission, a nine-member panel appointed by the governor.

The measure would streamline environmental reviews. For water projects on the coast, the California

Coastal Commission would be required to make a decision within 90 days, and could be overruled by the state's Secretary for Natural Resources.

Environmental impact reports would still be required. But if opponents filed lawsuits, courts would be required to rule on them within 270 days.

Minton noted that many of the state's political power players could oppose the measure because money guaranteed for water projects means less for other spending in the state budget.

"This is the largest scam in California history to take over \$100 billion of taxpayer funds away from nurses, teachers and firefighters in order to pay for the sponsors' special interest projects," he said.

Political observers say the measure will have a challenge collecting enough signatures to qualify for the ballot. But if the drought continues and water restrictions are tightened statewide, as local and state water officials have predicted

will occur, it could become a populist issue that might have a chance at passage.

"The drier it gets, the better the prospects for this measure," said Jack Pitney, a professor of political science at Claremont McKenna College in Los Angeles County.

"If I were running the no campaign, I would frame it as a giveaway to agribusiness," he said. "But for a lot of Californians, if we get to August and are in a severe drought, the attitude is going to be 'to heck with the environment, I want my shower.'"

Supporters have so far raised about \$100,000, mostly from Central Valley farm interests. The organizers include Wayne Western Jr., a board member of the California Farm Water Coalition; Geoffrey Vanden Heuvel, director of regulatory and economic affairs for the California Milk Producers Council; and several supporters of building a new desalination plant in Huntington Beach: Steve Sheldon, president of the Or-

ange County Water District board of directors and Shawn Dewane, a member of the Mesa Water District board of directors in Costa Mesa.

California voters approved a major water bond, Proposition 1, in November 2014 during the last drought. That \$7.45 billion measure has funded projects from upgrades to drinking water plants to recycled water efforts. It also included \$2.7 billion for new storage projects.

But none have been built yet. In 2018, the California Water Commission approved spending \$2.5 billion on eight storage projects — four new dams and four underground storage projects — including expanding Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Contra Costa County and building a new reservoir in Santa Clara County near Pacheco Pass.

But before the projects can receive the money, they need to obtain all permits, finish environmental studies and identify other funds to pay more than 50% of their costs.

## State to stop water deliveries

### CALIFORNIA DROUGHT

Urban areas must find other sources, tighten conservation

By Paul Rogers

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In a stark indicator of California's worsening drought, the Newsom administration announced Wednesday that cities and farms should expect to receive virtually no water next year from the State Water Project, a massive system of dams, pipes and canals that typically provides water to 27 million people from Silicon Valley to San Diego.

The unprecedented announcement — with only small amounts of emergency supplies possible for some urban areas— means that unless this winter brings significant rainfall, more stringent conservation measures are likely in San Jose, parts of the East Bay and other communities across the state in 2022, including strict limits on landscape watering.

“We’re coming off an historic set of conditions,” said Karla Nemeth, director of the state Department of Water Resources.

Nemeth also said that if significant

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rainfall does not occur this winter, Gov. Gavin Newsom is likely to impose mandatory urban water conservation targets, similar to those put in place by former Gov. Jerry Brown during California's last drought from 2012-16.

“We’ll see that probably late winter, early spring if these dry conditions persist,” she said. This summer, Newsom asked California residents and businesses to reduce urban water use by 15% from last year’s levels. But they are falling far short, cutting by only 3.9% in September.

The past two years have been the driest back-to-back years in Northern California since 1976-77, leaving major reservoirs at record-low levels. Lake Oroville, in Butte County, the second-largest reservoir in the state and the largest in the State Water Project, was just 30% full Wednesday.

Even though Northern California received heavy rain in October, much of it soaked into the dry ground instead of running off into reservoirs. Since then, very little rain has fallen.

The State Water Project, approved by voters in 1960 and a key legacy of former Gov. Pat Brown, moves water from Northern California to the south. It takes melting snow from the Sierra Nevada and transports it from Lake Oroville through the Sacramento- San Joaquin River Delta all the way to the Los Angeles Basin. In normal times, it supplies drinking water to 2

the Santa Clara Valley Water District in San Jose, which provides drinking water to 2 million South Bay residents. Also hit: Alameda County Water District, which provides water to 360,000 people in Fremont, Newark and Union City; and Zone 7 Water Agency, which serves Livermore, Pleasanton and Dublin.

The news does not affect customers of the East Bay Municipal Utility District, Contra Costa Water District, Marin Municipal Water District or San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, who receive their water from other sources and projects.

Urban areas such as San Jose, Fremont and Livermore, along with Los Angeles and Napa, will have to find other water sources, including local reservoirs, groundwater, more conservation and purchases from farm agencies to get through next year. And many farmers will have to pump more groundwater or fallow fields.

“With the conditions we’ve been seeing, and the reservoir levels where they are, I don’t think we are surprised,” said Aaron Baker, a chief operating officer with the Santa Clara Valley Water District. “It is symbolic of the dry, warmer conditions we are in.”

Baker said the Santa Clara Valley Water District will use local groundwater, conservation and purchases from farm agencies in the Sacramento Valley with senior water rights to avoid severe shortages. Its 10 local reservoirs are only 11% full now.



out of 3 Californians — and irrigates about 750,000 acres of farmland.

Nemeth said her department is in discussions with seven of the 29 urban and agricultural agencies that contract to receive StateWater Project water for them to receive “very modest” amounts of “health and safety” water next summer for firefighting, hospitals and some indoor uses, including drinking water, toilets, showers and clothes washing, but not for landscape irrigation.

That amount will be 55 gallons per person per day, she said. The state could provide the difference if local water agencies cannot meet that amount, she added. The total the state expects to deliver of such “health and safety” water is 340,000 acre-feet. By comparison, all cities and farm districts have state contracts for 4.2 million acre- feet.

Wednesday’s announcement is the first time since January 2014, during the depths of the last drought, for a 0% allotment, and the first time ever that such an announcement was made in December, at the beginning of winter.

Among the agencies affected by Wednesday’s news are

This summer, the district asked Santa Clara County residents to cut water use 15% from 2019 levels to preserve supplies. So far, they have reduced by only 7%.

Baker said that if it doesn’t rain significantly this winter, Santa Clara County residents should expect more stringent water conservation rules next summer.

On Wednesday, the Marin Municipal Water District, which serves 190,000 people in Marin County, prohibited all outdoor landscape watering seven days a week, with fines for violators. Healdsburg, in Sonoma County, has had similar rules in place for months.

“We need local leaders to step up and make those decisions,” Nemeth said. “If they won’t, the state will.”

# Frazier announces resignation from Assembly to pursue career in transportation, spend time with family, friends

December 2, 2021 By [Publisher](#) [Leave a Comment](#)



Assemblyman Jim Frazier. *Source: Twitter*

**“It was the best job in the world, helping people and solving problems.”– Jim Frazier**

**Currently serves most of East County**

*By Allen Payton*

In a post on his [official Facebook page](#) and [Twitter feed](#), Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021 State Assemblyman Jim Frazier (D-11) announced he will be resigning from his position at the end of the month.

In addition to posting his letter of resignation, at 12:32 pm Wednesday, he tweeted, “It has been a joy and a privilege to represent District 11. I extend my sincerest appreciation to each of you. Thank you all.” Frazier posted a similar comment on his Facebook page, writing, “It has been a joy and a privilege to represent District 11. I extend my sincerest appreciation and love for an incredible 9 years of service. Thank you all.”

His announcement dispels the rumors that Frazier, who moved from Oakley to Fairfield a few years ago, would run for supervisor in Solano County, State Senate or Congress, if Rep. John Garamendi was going to retire. But the Assemblyman, was first elected to the Assembly in 2012 following his time on the Oakley City Council, could have served one more term, since members of the state legislature can only serve a total of 12 years in either the Assembly or State Senate or a combination of both, due to [term limits in Proposition 28](#) passed by voters in 2012.

When reached for comment Frazier said, “it’s time to move on and I have a strong urge to get back into the transportation sector, pursue my passion, and help people achieve their goals in transportation.”

“It was the best job in the world, helping people and solving problems,” he continued. I’ve served for 14 years in public service. It’s time to move on.”

Asked about the rumors he might run for another office, Frazier laughed and said, “nobody asked me.”

The press release reads: [Jim Frazier resignation ltr 12-02-21](#)

“California State Assemblymember Jim Frazier (D-Fairfield) today announced his resignation from the California State Assembly, District 11, effective December 31, 2021. Mr. Frazier will be seeking new opportunities in the field of transportation.

Assemblymember Frazier said, “This is the best job that I have ever had. I have enjoyed serving the State of California and the 11th Assembly District and greatly appreciate the confidence that my constituents have shown in me over the last nine years. I am proud of the many successes that we achieved together. My future plans are to put to use my passion and experience in the transportation sector, explore new career opportunities and spend additional time with family and friends.”

Mr. Frazier was elected to the California State Assembly, District 11 in November of 2012. The 11th District encompasses portions of Solano, Contra Costa and Sacramento counties and includes the following cities, towns, and areas: Antioch, Bethel Island, Birds Landing, Brentwood, Byron, Collinsville, Discovery Bay, Fairfield, Isleton, Knightsen, Locke, Oakley, Pittsburg (partial), Rio Vista, Suisun City, Travis Air Force Base, Vacaville and Walnut Grove.

Assemblymember Frazier currently serves as Chair of the powerful Assembly Governmental Organization Committee, providing oversight of open meeting laws, Offices of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, State Controller, and State Treasurer, State holidays, seals, and official acts, emergency services, Outdoor Advertising Act (billboards), alcohol, gaming, horse racing, the State Lottery, and tobacco. He has been an advocate for enhanced unemployment and disability policy as chairman of Select Committee on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. As a key member of the Assembly Veteran’s Committee, he supported legislation to improve lives of veterans. Mr. Frazier oversaw and helped coordinate state public works activities while serving as the Assembly Speaker’s appointee to the State Public Works Board. Mr. Frazier previously served as chairman of the Assembly Transportation Committee, overseeing transportation infrastructure managing \$2.3T in annual commerce, and promoting system improvements and job creation.

Additional key accomplishments:

- Delivered numerous improvements to transportation infrastructure across high-speed rail, highways, and public transportation, securing \$30B in total transportation funding and \$5.2B for highly impactful SB1 infrastructure project.
- Fostered legislation to obtain \$1.2B in funding for special needs population, supporting and overseeing series of hearings throughout the State of California, evaluating the mission and effectiveness of relevant state agencies.
- Established reputation as champion for California Delta, serving as key member of Delta Protection Commission focused on protecting fish and wildlife, safeguarding farmers, and

ensuring continuous environmental and economic viability of delta by promoting water conservation, improved water quality, and improved management of land use and development.

- Secured \$12 million to remove abandoned and derelict commercial marine vessels throughout the Delta region through the 2021 State Budget.
- Secured funding for Special Olympics for 6 years, including \$20M funding through the 2021 State Budget.
- Secured funding for Solano First 5 in the amount of \$2 million to create a Fairfield First 5 Center through the 2021 State Budget.
- Secured \$500,000 for East Contra Costa Fire Protection District's training program.
- Authored legislation for a Veteran Designation of CA Driver's License to recognize military service, resulting in hundreds of thousands of additional dollars for Veterans.

Mr. Frazier's was recognized with many awards during his Assembly career. His accomplishments include (partial list): 2018, Legislator of the Year from the California State Commanders Veterans Council, 2017 California Transportation Foundation Elected Official of the Year, Director's Special Recognition for Infrastructure Advocacy by American Society of Civil Engineers, 2016 Special Olympics Volunteer of the Year, 2016 AMVETS Legislator of the Year, 2015 Decoding Dyslexia: Assemblymember of the Year, 2015 California Transportation Foundation: Elected Official of the Year, 2015 Small Business Legislator of the year by California Small Business Association (CSBA) and California Small Business Roundtable (CSBR), 2015 CA Waterfowl Association, Grant Kenyon Award, Legislator of the Year, Appreciation Award: Sikh Communities of Napa and Solano Counties and Fairfield- Suisun Unified School District.

An avid supporter of non-profits, Mr. Frazier was a Founder and Vice President of the Friends of Oakley Community Foundation from 2007 until 2013. A dedicated volunteer, Mr. Frazier served on the Boys and Girls Club Advisory Board, a Board of Director member for Impact Teen Drivers and dearest to his heart, he has been a volunteer with Special Olympics since 2005."



## 2 more run to replace Mitchoff

**Debora Allen, Roxanne Garza join contest for District 4 supervisor's seat; field now at five**

### CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

**By Shomik Mukherjee**

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Two more people have announced they intend to run for Contra Costa County Supervisor Karen Mitchoff's open District 4 seat next June, bringing to five the number of candidates who want to represent a largely suburban region with the county's major business centers.

District 4 encompasses much of Concord and Walnut Creek, as well as Pleasant Hill, Clayton and some of the area around Mount Diablo.

Area City Council members Carlyn Obringer, Ken Carlson and Edi Birsan earlier filed statements of their intention to succeed Mitchoff, who is known for her candid and often confrontational approach at supervisors meetings.

The two new candidates are Debora Allen, who represents the central county on the BART Board of Directors, and Roxanne Garza, a Pleasant Hill resident with years of experience at Healthy Richmond and Contra Costa Health Services.

Here's a rundown of the new additions to a growing field of candidates:

#### **Roxanne Garza**

While she is the only candidate so far to never have held public office, Garza said her work as senior director at Healthy Richmond — a nonprofit focused on health equity and racial justice — has provided on-the-ground know-how



Allen



Garza

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and helped her foster relationships with west county community leaders.

Prior to her tenure there, she worked as a public health program manager at the county health department, where she also volunteered to boost testing and vaccine distribution among the county's uninsured front-line workers during the pandemic.

When UC Berkeley proposed a since-abandoned plan for a new research facility in Richmond, Garza was among those pushing it to offer generous community benefits in exchange for approval. She has also focused some of her nonprofit work on tenant assistance: "I want people who grew up here to be able to stay here," she said.

Kramer for county assessor. She switched races recently after her community was split off from Supervisor Diane Burgis' district, allowing her to vie for Mitchoff's open seat.

Prior to her time on the BART board, Allen unsuccessfully pursued the Republican nomination for a state Assembly seat. But the small-business consultant doesn't bill herself as a conservative — just a data-driven official committed to making the county's transportation, housing and local economy more efficient.

"If we want to focus on the quality of life for the average residents of Contra Costa County, one of the things we can help them with is providing good jobs inside of our county, so their commute times are

Garza contends every inequity in the county is related, a belief that stems from her work in public health, whose shortcomings she said were laid bare by the pandemic.

“The issue is not just about lifting the voices of residents,” Garza said. “It’s about, how do you set the table where residents are meeting with decisionmakers?”

Garza’s advocacy recently led to her appointment by Supervisor John Gioia to a committee that makes recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on how to spend sales tax revenue.

The board recently gave \$2.5 million in tax revenue to the Contra Costa County Sheriff’s Office, enraging some committee members, including Gioia’s appointees, who had opposed that move. Mitchoff strongly defended the allocation and accused opponents of harboring a “personal animus” toward Sheriff David Livingston.

Garza, who was appointed to the advisory committee after that meeting, said she would’ve pushed for other spending priorities besides sheriff’s funding, and believes District 4 voters agree with her.

“I think the central county is looking for different solutions to some of these issues as well,” Garza said. “It’s not about progressive versus conservative when it comes to community safety. It’s about, how do we transform these systems and look at the root causes of (c r i m e) ? ”

### **Debora Allen**

As a BART board director, Allen has consistently managed to stand out for her views, which some of her colleagues often find polarizing. Six of the nine board directors endorsed her challenger in last year’s election, although Allen won anyway.

She pushed for job cuts and more conservative spending policies during the pandemic and vigorously defended funding for BART police amid last year’s movement for public safety alternatives. Her BART district includes Walnut Creek, Concord, Martinez, San Ramon, Danville and Pleasant Hill.

A resident of unincorporated Clayton, Allen initially filed with the elections office to challenge Gus

reduced,” Allen said. “We need to look for ways to... keep people from needing to travel outside of the county for work.”

Despite the federal stimulus money that poured into BART in the past year, Allen maintains her stance on cutting jobs, saying the agency cannot sustainably limp along on federal subsidies. She attributes her fellow directors’ lack of support to what she described as the “labor unions’ control over BART.”

If train ridership does not return on its own after the pandemic, then the county needs to focus on boosting transportation into the future, she said. That includes automated vehicle testing at GoMentum Station in Concord, as well as the transit- adjacent Naval Weapons Station development that promises 13,000 new homes in the city.

Allen has built a political alliance with law enforcement — receiving a \$1,000 campaign contribution last year from the union that represents BART police officers, which additionally spent more than \$10,000 in advertising to support her re- election.

In 2019, she published an op-ed for this news organization arguing for more security enforcement in the train systems and calling the agency’s community safety program “toothless” for its reliance on unarmed civilians.

Allen says she supports more mental health services and crisis response in the county but wants law enforcement to remain a core part of the equation.

“I don’t believe in throwing out police and putting some replacement in that has no police training,” she said. “It’s easy to look back after someone gets hurt (by police) and say they should have done this or that. But you don’t know which person in crisis is a danger, until they’re a danger — there’s no way to predict that.”



# Levee breach marks end of initial phase of restoration



PHOTOS: RAY SAINT GERMAIN — BAY CITY NEWS

The levee holding back water from Suisun Bay is breached, allowing water to flow into the 232-acre Pacheco Marsh in Martinez on Friday. The flooding follows seven months of heavy civil construction as part of the marsh and lower Walnut Creek watershed restoration project.

## Ceremonial flooding culminates nearly 20 years of work to restore habitat

**By Tony Hicks**  
*Bay City News Foundation*

Before breaching the last levee preventing seawater from rushing into Pacheco Marsh for the first time in generations, workers scrambled to make sure water wouldn't flow the wrong way.

The recent record-setting storms brought more than 7 inches of rain to the marsh southeast of the Benicia-Martinez Bridge, forcing workers to pump out more than a million gallons of rainwater to get the desired effect at Friday's ceremonial flooding.

"The storm we had Sunday was off the charts," said Paul Detjens, the project manager and senior civil engineer from the Contra Costa County Flood Control District. "Locally, it created some problems for us out here. A week ago, this channel was bone dry. And now it's filled with rainwater,



Spectators gather to watch the event Friday at Pacheco Marsh.

and in an hour it's going to be full of tidal water. Bring it on. We're ready."

An hour later, as earthmovers dug out the last dirt barrier to scattered applause among guests, event emcee and tele-

vision personality Doug McConnell announced, "Water's in. And it's coming home."

Friday culminated nearly 20 years of work restoring 200 of the project's 300 acres to its natural habitat, before 19th-cen-

tury industry changed its landscape.

Contra Costa County spent \$11 million on the Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project, the largest public works project in county history. The site is just over the hill from the Al McNabney Marsh, across Interstate 680 from the Martinez Refining Company.

Once the county Board of Supervisors approved the \$11.285 million contract with Four M Contracting in March, shovels were in the dirt just weeks later. Now that tidal water is surging back into the marsh, the John Muir Land Trust can finish transforming the area into a birdwatcher's paradise and recreation destination.

"From here, the foundation of the public access has been set," said Linus Eukel, executive director of John Muir Land Trust. "We're basically icing that with public access. Our hope is we'll

**LEVEE » PAGE 4**



Four M equipment operator Steve Berens removes the levee holding back Suisun Bay at the 232-acre Pacheco Marsh in Martinez on Friday. The flooding follows seven months of heavy civil construction as part of the marsh and lower Walnut Creek watershed restoration project.

RAY SAINT GERMAIN  
BAY CITY NEWS



## Levee

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have that accomplished by 2023.”

The earthmoving isn't done. Three elevated vistas more than 20 feet high will be created, surrounded by new hiking trails, boardwalks, interpretative displays and bridges over the marsh's northern reach. A massive haul of native plants will be re-introduced, rich habitat for the marsh's endangered salt marsh harvest mouse.

The Mt. Diablo Audubon Society has already recorded more than 80 species of birds at Pacheco Marsh, species like the short-eared owl, white-tailed kite, American kestrel, northern harrier and loggerhead shrike.

“This habitat will just be flooded with new bird life, and we expect it's going to be an international destination, but also an important local destination for kids and families to learn about it as well,” Eukel said, adding the group has raised \$3.5 million of its \$5 million goal. “We're in really good shape,” he said.

The Walnut Creek watershed is Contra Costa County's largest, draining more than 150 square miles from eight cities into a marsh that, over the past century, became a dumping ground

for dredging and an industrial buffer to the bay.

Engineers want to enhance the area's flood-carrying capacity, while naturalists want conditions closer to those existing before humans channelized the marsh and brought industry.

The marsh and Walnut Creek were home to grizzly bears, elk, salmon and steelhead until the mid-1800s.

Then humans began filling in wetlands and building dikes. Merchant ships sailed up Walnut Creek, and other creeks feeding into Walnut Creek were diverted for humans developing Contra Costa County. Refineries were built, and the area was used as a dumping ground for dredging projects all over the Bay Area.

The county bought 122 acres of the marsh in 2003 from a towing company that once planned a junkyard there. Nearby Marathon Oil refinery bought another 18 adjacent acres formerly used for sand mining and donated it to the land trust in 2020.

Planners envision the Iron Horse Regional Trail, which now ends near State Highway 4, to extend another 3 miles along Walnut Creek into Waterbird Regional Preserve near Martinez. There will be another 2.4 miles of trails into the marsh, with a staging area,

parking lot, bird-watching blinds and interpretive panels in the elevated areas.

The project will not only alleviate stress on neighboring shores as the seas rise in coming years, but it was also designed with sea rise in mind. As the marsh transforms, rising water will blend with more sediment, acting as a carbon filter helping to restrain greenhouse gases.

Workers will add 31,000 new native plants to the area. There's also talk of other amenities, like a kayak launch, which is still up in the air. Though the entire project is called Lower Walnut Creek Restoration, the northern reach the section north of Waterfront Road will be managed by the land trust and called Pacheco Marsh. The southern reach will include levee improvements.

Detjens called Friday “a real high point of my career.”

“I've been with it from the beginning,” Detjens said. “I'm really happy to see the turnout. Typically, a levee breach like this, maybe 20 people show up, some people in orange vests and some people who gave some money. But we have like 250 people. I'm blown over by it. Whether you call it lower Walnut Creek or Pacheco Marsh — they're really the same thing — and it's a really a cool place.”