

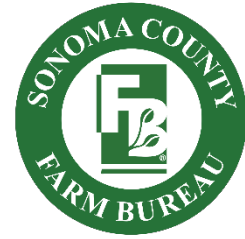


Water Future

August 1, 2023

By Doug Beretta, President

<http://sonomafb.org/water-future/>



A little over a year ago I was asked to be a part of a stakeholder working group for the City of Santa Rosa called *Our Water Future*. At the time we were in the third year of our local drought, and agriculture was being cut back 50% to 70% on reclaimed water for irrigation from Santa Rosa City. So, I said yes to being part of the stakeholder group. Finally in October of 2022 the first meeting was scheduled.

When I looked at the agenda, I thought to myself, “Why am I doing this?” There wasn’t a lot of information sent to us, but I could see that the organizer had worked hard getting a very diverse group of stakeholders to participate. When I arrived, we had been assigned seats at tables of six or eight. The program started with an overview of the project *Our Water Future*. For the next hour we were asked questions, then given the opportunity to respond individually and as a group from our group at the table we were seated at. There was a lot of discussion back and forth. The talking points from each table were then brought to the whole group for more discussion.

When we left that day the consulting firm had their work cut out for them to take the talking points, ideas, and comments and get them into something we as the group could move forward with. Over the next 8 months the stakeholder group participated in 3 more 3-hour meetings coming up with four different portfolios to be submitted to the Board of Public Utilities, Santa Rosa City Council, and the public. During the whole process there were in person workshops and webinars that the public could attend and offer feedback.

I went into this pretty skeptical that not much was going to come out of it. In the end I have to commend everyone that was involved in the process. The stakeholders worked hard bringing information, both good and bad, to the group. The consultant group and city staff did a great job putting that information into a document that includes four portfolios that I think should be approved and moved forward. The biggest hurdle that I see will be cost and time to get projects up and rolling. I know we were told that other Cities and the County of Sonoma were in the process of evaluating their water future too. We were told there are other departments within Santa Rosa that were working on new ideas for recapture of flood waters when available, more efficiency of water use etc.

I think the biggest takeaway I have from this process is that it opened people’s minds to really try and figure out some solutions and that any solution needs to be a regional approach to address how our water is used and how our aquifer can be replenished during the wet years.