

CITY OF SANTA ROSA  
BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

TO: BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES  
FROM: PETER MARTIN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER RESOURCES,  
SANTA ROSA WATER

SUBJECT: DIRECTION TO SANTA ROSA PLAIN GROUNDWATER  
SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY BOARDMEMBER REGARDING  
ADOPTION OF THE GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY PLAN  
FOR THE SANTA ROSA PLAIN SUBBASIN

AGENDA ACTION: MOTION

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by Santa Rosa Water that the Board of Public Utilities, by motion, recommend to the City Council that the Council recommend that the City's Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency Boardmember support adoption of the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Plan at their December 9, 2021 Public Hearing.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act requires that the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SRP GSA), comprised of the Cities of Cotati, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, and Sebastopol, the Town of Windsor, the County of Sonoma, Sonoma Water, the Gold Ridge and Sonoma Resource Conservation Districts, and a group of independently owned water systems, develop, adopt and submit a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) by January 31, 2022. After more than two years of multi-jurisdictional planning efforts, the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency released the Draft GSP on October 1, 2021. The GSP was finalized and is now proposed for adoption at a public hearing of the SRP GSA scheduled for December 9, 2021. The City's current SRP GSA Boardmember is Councilmember Schwedhelm. Santa Rosa Water staff is recommending the Board of Public Utilities provide direction to the City Council and City's SRP GSA Boardmember regarding adoption of the GSP at that public hearing.

BACKGROUND

In 2014, the California State Legislature began a very public investigation into the extent of groundwater overdraft issues statewide. A widening body of scientific evidence showed

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the annual rate of overdraft statewide was approaching unsustainable levels, with the rate of subsidence in the greater Central Valley creating problems that could become irreversible. The state was already experiencing a multi-year drought, and the overuse of groundwater basins to supplement diminished surface water supplies was causing unprecedented rates of groundwater elevation loss. The legislature spent the better part of 2014 developing three pieces of legislation that would ultimately become the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which became effective in early 2015.

SGMA substantially changed the way groundwater is managed in California. SGMA gives local agencies the necessary authorities to manage their groundwater in a sustainable manner and allows for some state intervention in certain limited scenarios, mostly as a “backstop” to protect groundwater resources.

The law required that groundwater basins and subbasins in California designated as medium- or high-priority by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) be managed “sustainably” according to SGMA. This means that the basin or subbasin must be managed to avoid certain identified undesirable results. The Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Subbasin (Subbasin), designated as basin number 1-55.01 in DWR’s Bulletin No. 118 (2016), is categorized as a medium-priority basin, and therefore subject to the requirements of SGMA.

SGMA included several mandates, predominantly: 1) local agencies must form one or more new governing bodies known as Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to carry out the objectives of SGMA, 2) GSAs must develop and adopt one or multiple Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) that fully cover the DWR prioritized subbasin by specified deadlines, 3) GSAs must implement the GSP, manage, and achieve quantifiable objectives and sustainability within 20 years of GSP adoption, and, 4) regularly report data and GSP progress to DWR during the 20-year planning and implementation horizon.

In 2015, a coalition of local entities that were eligible to become GSAs began meeting to facilitate the requirement that a GSA be formed before June 30, 2017. A series of public workshops were conducted in 2015, 2016 and 2017 to inform the public about the requirements of SGMA, and to solicit feedback and receive public input regarding the development of the GSA.

A working group comprised of these entities developed a Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement and Bylaws during that time. On May 2, 2017 the Santa Rosa City Council approved the Joint Powers Agreement and approved the City’s membership in the future GSA. In June 2017, the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SRP GSA) was formed and formally recognized by DWR as the GSA representing the Subbasin. The SRP GSA membership includes the Cities of Cotati, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, and Sebastopol, the Town of Windsor, the County of Sonoma, Sonoma Water, the Gold Ridge

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and Sonoma Resource Conservation Districts, and a group of independently owned water systems. The City's current SRP GSA Boardmember is Councilmember Schwedhelm.

The SRP GSA has a Contract Administrator, a Board of Directors comprised of SRP GSA member agency representatives, and an Advisory Committee comprised of member agency representatives along with environmental, rural residential well-users, agricultural, business community, and tribal representatives.

The SRP GSA has broad discretionary authorities, pursuant to SGMA, to implement the GSP and achieve sustainability. The authorities include:

- Requiring registration of wells and measurement of extractions
- Requesting revisions to basin boundaries
- Regulating extractions
- Implementing capital projects
- Assessing fees

The overarching goal from the initial creation of the SRP GSA was to have an inclusive makeup and governance structure for the purpose of coordinating the various groundwater management activities within the Subbasin, including the development and implementation of a single GSP for the entire Subbasin. Since 2017, the SRP GSA Board and Advisory Committee have met regularly in publicly noticed meetings in pursuit of drafting a comprehensive GSP for submission to DWR by January 31, 2022.

On October 1, 2021 a Final Draft GSP was released by the SRP GSA for public review and comment. The GSP was posted online at [santarosaplaingroundwater.org/gsp/](https://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/gsp/) and hard copies were distributed to the following locations: all regional libraries within the Subbasin, Sonoma Water's administrative office, Santa Rosa City Hall, Rohnert Park City Hall, Sebastopol City Hall, Cotati City Hall and Windsor Town Hall. The public review and comment period was scheduled through October 31, 2021.

In addition to the regularly scheduled and publicly noticed monthly meetings of the SRP GSA, two public workshops were held remotely via Zoom, one during the development period of the GSP on May 19, 2021, and one after the release of the public draft on October 13, 2021.

Pursuant to California Water Code Section 10728.4, a GSA may take the following action: "A groundwater sustainability agency may adopt or amend a groundwater sustainability plan after a public hearing, held at least 90 days after providing notice to a city or county within the area of the proposed plan or amendment. The groundwater sustainability agency shall review and consider comments from any city or county that receives notice pursuant to this section and shall consult with a city or county that requests consultation within 30 days of receipt of the notice. Nothing in this section is intended to preclude an agency and a city or county from otherwise consulting or commenting regarding the

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adoption or amendment of a plan.” A Notice of Intent was circulated by the SRP GSA on August 25, 2021, opening the mandated 90 day noticing window for the SRP GSA to adopt the GSP.

The SRP GSA Board of Directors is scheduled to consider adoption of the GSP in a hearing during their public meeting to be held on December 9, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. Members of the public are encouraged to attend and provide their comments on the GSP at the meeting.

A copy of the complete SRP GSA GSP may be found at the following address:

<https://santarosaplainingroundwater.org/gsp/>

For more than three years, appointed members of the City of Santa Rosa City Council and Santa Rosa Water Staff have participated in the development of the GSP through continued representation on the SRP GSA Board of Directors and Advisory Committee. Santa Rosa Water staff are supportive of the transparent public process facilitated by the SRP GSA during the development and drafting of the GSP and support the final GSP that is proposed for adoption by the SRP GSA Board of Directors. Santa Rosa Water staff are recommending the Board of Public Utilities provide direction to the City Council and City’s SRP GSA Boardmember to support adoption of the GSP at the public hearing scheduled on December 9, 2021.

### ANALYSIS

The 78,720-acre Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Subbasin is generally bounded on the west by low-lying hills of the Mendocino Range and on the east by the Sonoma Mountains and Mayacamas Mountains. The Subbasin is approximately 22 miles long and the width varies from approximately nine miles through the Santa Rosa area to six miles wide at the south end of the valley near the city of Cotati and narrows greatly at its northern end. The Subbasin includes portions of the Town of Windsor; cities of Cotati, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, and Sebastopol; and areas of unincorporated rural communities and agricultural cultivation. The principal streams in the Subbasin are Mark West Creek, Santa Rosa Creek, and Laguna de Santa Rosa, which drain a combined watershed area of approximately 251 square miles.

Santa Rosa Water derives approximately 6% of the City’s annual water supply from groundwater wells within the Subbasin, and there are some plans for expansion of groundwater supplies in the future. In addition to the aforementioned municipal wells, many residents and businesses within the City of Santa Rosa have domestic and irrigation wells that will be affected by the implementation efforts in the GSP. This includes the imposition of annual fees to support implementation of the GSP and limited regulatory oversight of some wells that may lie within the City’s jurisdictional boundaries.

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The SRP GSA will be responsible for ensuring the achievement of a long-term sustainable yield of groundwater resources in the Subbasin. Given that a considerable portion of water supplies in rural and urban areas throughout the subbasin rely upon shared groundwater resources, the implementation of the GSP could affect long-term land use decisions on a region-wide scale. Under SGMA, land-use planning agencies must notify GSAs of any proposal to substantially amend a general plan and must review and consider any adopted groundwater plan (including GSA comments) when amending their general plan. Therefore, the GSP will need to be considered and coordinated jurisdictional land-use evaluations by the City of Santa Rosa will occur in future land-use planning efforts.

SGMA requires that after adoption of the GSP, the SRP GSA must continue to take measures to monitor and manage the basin in a way that is deemed sustainable by the year 2040. Overall, the Subbasin is generally in good condition in terms of quality and quantity compared to other subbasins throughout the state. However, the GSP shows that there has been a limited historical decline in overall groundwater storage. The GSP additionally identifies several data gaps that will require additional monitoring and studies as part of the implementation of the plan. The GSP outlines a series of successive projects and management actions that may need to be implemented on a 50-year planning horizon. Without the projects and management actions that have been included in the GSP, the subbasin is projected to experience additional declines by 2071. Therefore, the adoption of the GSP by the SRP GSA is only the first of many actions necessary to meet planning and groundwater resources stewardship objectives for the region while remaining in compliance with SGMA mandates.

#### FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Pursuant to California Water Code Section 10728.6, Division 13 (commencing with Section 21000) of the Public Resources Code, the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) do not apply to the preparation and adoption of Groundwater Sustainability Plans in compliance with SGMA.

This action is further exempt from CEQA because it is not an action which has a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, and thus is not a project pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378.

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BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On October 20, 2016, the Board of Public Utilities conducted a study session on the Groundwater Sustainability Agency Formation and provided direction to staff.

On April 20, 2017 the Board of Public Utilities adopted a Resolution recommending that the City Council, by resolution, approve the Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (JPA) creating the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA), approve the City of Santa Rosa's membership in the GSA, delegate authority to the Mayor to appoint the Director and Alternate Director to the GSA Board of Directors, and delegate authority to the Director of Santa Rosa Water to appoint the GSA Advisory Committee member and alternate.

On August 5, 2021 the Board of Public Utilities conducted a detailed study session regarding the draft GSP and provided direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – Executive Summary: Groundwater Sustainability Plan for the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Subbasin

CONTACT

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