MINUTES OF THE SOUTHEAST WATER COALITION
REGULAR MEETING OF THE POLICY BOARD
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2025, 7:00 p.m.

A regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Southeast Water Coalition Joint Powers Authority was held on Thursday, February 6, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. at the Norwalk Arts & Sports Complex, Sproul Room, 13000 Clarkdale Avenue, Norwalk CA 90650. Chair Ana Valencia called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. At the time the meeting was called to order, a quorum of members was present.

Ms. Madeline Anderson took attendance, and the following Board of Directors members were present:

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Kevin Lainez	City of Commerce
Horacio Ortiz	City of Downey
Todd Rogers	City of Lakewood
Ana Valencia	City of Norwalk
Isabel Aguayo	City of Paramount
Andrew Lara	City of Pico Rivera
Joe Angel Zamora	City of Santa Fe Springs
Maria del Pilar Avalos	City of South Gate
Melissa Ybarra	City of Vernon
Octavio Martinez	City of Whittier

STAFF AND GUESTS ON SIGN-IN SHEET:

Jared Lee	City of Cerritos – AE
Andrew Caraveo	City of Commerce – AE
Dan Mueller	City of Downey – AE
Derek Nguyen	City of Lakewood – AE
Glen Kau	City of Norwalk – AE
Michelle Tse	City of Paramount – AE
Joanna Moreno	City of Vernon – AE
Ray Cordero	City of Whittier – AE

Kyle Cason	City of Whittier – AE
Jacque Koontz	City of Norwalk Staff
Michael Jea	City of Norwalk Staff
Madeline Anderson	SEWC Staff
Nicholas Ghirelli	Richards Watson & Gershon
Genesis Rodriguez	LA County Sanitation Districts
Elisa Mendez	Metropolitan Water District
John Bednarksi	Metropolitan Water District
Kimberly Wilson	Metropolitan Water District
Stephan Tucker	Water Replenishment District
Vera DeWitt	Water Replenishment District

ITEM 2 – PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ITEM 3 - CONSENT CALENDAR

Director Rogers moved to approve the consent calendar.

The motion was seconded by Director Zamora and was approved by the following voice vote:

AYES: **Lainez, Rogers, Valencia, Aguayo, Lara, Zamora, Avalos, Ybarra, Martinez**

NOES: **None.**

ABSTAIN: **Ortiz**

ITEM 4 - DISCUSSION/ACTION REGARDING PURE WATER SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PROGRAM OVERVIEW PRESENTATION BY THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (MWDSC)

Mr. Kau began by providing context on the Pure Water Southern California Program presentation, noting that the AE members had received the same presentation at the last AE meeting and provided feedback for this Board meeting presentation.

Mr. Bednarski began with an announcement that there would be less digging than originally planned, which is a positive development as it means less disruption, particularly for the cities of SEWC.

Mr. Bednarski provided an overview of the program, highlighting the pipeline alignment and MWDSC's role as a wholesaler water provider. MWD operates five

large treatment plants and supplies water to 19 million people through 26 member agencies but does not directly retail water to households. The district also owns the Colorado River Aqueduct and has successfully increased its water supply through conservation efforts. However, water availability varies yearly based on weather conditions, leading to rationing when necessary.

The CAMP4W (Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Plan for Water) initiative examines current practices, future projects, and the impact of climate change on hydrology. California has already reduced water consumption by 35-40% over the past several decades, with current demands lower than in the 1980s. The Pure Water Southern California program will help meet those demands by collecting used water, purifying it, and repurposing it, instead of discharging it into the Pacific Ocean, which is the current practice. The purified water will be transported from Carson to the San Gabriel region to meet water needs in both areas while collaborating with other regions along the way. The program aims to produce 150 million gallons per day—enough for 1.5 million people—making it one of the largest programs of its kind. Most of the treated water will be used for groundwater replenishment, with minerals added back to enhance quality.

The program requires a $6 billion investment and expects to create 45,000 jobs. A workforce training center will be established to train water and wastewater operators, benefiting the local community. The program is currently in the environmental planning stage, with a draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) expected in April and a final EIR anticipated in January of next year. Preliminary designs are underway, and construction is expected to begin in 2027-2028. Funding sources include $80 million in state funding, $7 million in federal grants, $16.5 million from partner contributions, and $125 million from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Additional funding opportunities, such as state climate bonds and partnership contributions, are still being explored.

A demonstration plant is being used for testing and planning for direct potable reuse (DPR) pilot testing. Agreements are being developed with member agencies and partners to distribute the water. The project will include a labor agreement, internships, and job opportunities, with a strong focus on public education and community outreach.

During the discussion, Director Lara thanked Mr. Bednarski for working with the City of Pico Rivera and noted that SCE had upgraded the easement. There was also a discussion about President Donald Trump's comments regarding "opening up the spigots" for water access. Director Avalos clarified that this statement was related to wildfires, and Mr. Bednarski explained that water releases from reservoirs had disappointed farmers. Trump had promised to relax restrictions to increase water availability for agriculture and Southern California.

Director Lara inquired about the status of tunnel construction for the project. Mr. Bednarski responded that geotechnical investigations and permit acquisitions were underway, with tunnel construction expected to begin in two years. Public comments on the project have been extensive. Director Martinez asked about PFAS, and Mr. Bednarski confirmed that the reverse osmosis system used in the treatment process would eliminate PFAS contaminants from the water.

Director Lainez inquired about the cost of the treated water and the anticipated rate increases. Mr. Bednarski explained that untreated water is currently sold to member agencies at $1,200 per acre-foot, while the treated water is projected to cost around $3,000 per acre-foot—three times more expensive. The goal is to have the MWDSC Board of Directors distribute the cost in a way that would result in an approximate 20% increase. However, this increase will be phased in over time. Financing will be handled through bond issuances, with projected rate increases of 10-13% per year. Mr. Cason noted that while costs are rising, the higher price may also reduce reliability issues.

Director Avalos raised concerns about workforce opportunities and ensuring that workers from the South LA region are included in the project. Mr. Bednarski clarified that the program is nonpartisan in terms of hiring location.

Mr. Bednarski offered a tour of the facility and Director Valencia asked whether SEWC cities should approach the tour collectively or individually. A suggestion was made to host a meeting or a "lunch and learn" session to discuss opportunities further. Mr. Bednarski mentioned that dates could be sent out to members for coordination.

ITEM 5 - DISCUSSION/ACTION REGARDING SEWC FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO THE DIVISION OF DRINKING WATER (DDW) – HOLLYWOOD DISTRICT

Mr. Kau began the discussion with a reminder that the original letter to DDW was sent expressing concerns regarding unregulated requirements and at the December SEWC Board Meeting, the City of Lakewood brought up the fact that some of the issues were still ongoing. The Board agreed to send a follow-up letter, and Glen noted that there are no updates regarding the follow-up letter to DDW. After sending the letter, SEWC has not received any responses from DDW.

Director Rogers reiterated that we sent the letter December 10th, and we have not received a response. Mr. Nguyen mentioned that he also reached out and DDW noted that they have been busy with the fires. Director Lara thanked SEWC for the efforts of the cities to create and send this letter and because of this agency, Pico Rivera was able to have meetings with DDW, who understood their concerns about red tape and roadblocks.

ITEM 6 - DISCUSSION/ACTION REGARDING WATER REPLENISHMENT DISTRICT (WRD) BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BAC) LETTER

Director Valencia passed the discussion over to Mr. Kau who provided context around the Water Replenishment District of Southern California "WRDSC", the creation of the BAC, and how WRDSC approved a modification of their original code, adding new members. At the December SEWC Board meeting, concerns were raised about the fairness of this adjustment, with the City of Lakewood also expressing concerns about potential conflicts of interest. Two draft letters addressing these concerns were presented at the meeting, and it was decided that legal counsel would combine them into a single updated letter to be sent to WRDSC.

Mr. Stephan Tucker from WRDSC introduced his team and thanked SEWC for hosting them at the meeting. He acknowledged that the word "collaboration" had been used frequently and expressed his desire for continued cooperation moving forward. He emphasized that the BAC has no legal authority to set rates. For elected officials, BAC members serve four-year terms. Originally, the BAC was intended to review budgets and provide recommendations, but the legislation that established it has since sunsetted. Despite this, WRDSC decided to keep the BAC in place without any formal legal requirements or parameters. Historically, the BAC has included representatives from both the West Coast and Central Basins, consisting of small, medium, and large pumpers. However, the last election resulted in an imbalance in representation, leaving the West Coast Basin underrepresented. To address this, WRDSC amended its code to ensure equal representation. Mr. Tucker noted that ad-hoc meetings were open to the public and properly noticed and that WRDSC's decisions impact all pumpers equally. He reassured members that WRDSC always prioritizes keeping costs as low as possible and takes pride in being the most cost-effective water management option.

Mr. Tucker acknowledged the concerns raised and explained that the current solution is temporary. The issue will be revisited after the rate-setting process is completed. He invited all members to attend upcoming meetings to stay informed. Director Rogers thanked WRDSC for its collaboration and raised concerns about the impact of the changes. He pointed out that the Central Basin covers about 81% of WRD's costs, while the West Coast Basin accounts for only 19%, yet the new structure aims for equal representation. He questioned how the division between the two basins was determined. Mr. Tucker explained that the boundary is defined by the Newport-Inglewood Fault, though it is not visible. He emphasized that he does not weigh decisions based on financial contributions

alone, noting that if decisions were based purely on volume pumped, Long Beach would outvote all other regions.

Director Lara raised concerns about pumping into the West Basin spreading grounds, highlighting that not all areas feel WRDSC's decisions equally. He pointed out that Pico Rivera has been significantly affected by contaminated water being dumped into spreading grounds and argued that SEWC should have a higher level of representation. Additionally, concerns were raised about contaminants, particularly PFAS. Mr. Tucker noted that the EPA has a long list of contaminants that many people are unaware of, with PFAS being just one of 1,200 chemical compounds found in water supplies. He explained that WRDSC distributes recycled water widely, with its PFAS program primarily focused on the Central Basin.

Director Lara also raised concerns about the PFAS remediation, particularly the requirement for participants to sign an agreement waiving their right to sue in the future. He noted that Orange County (OC) had similar PFAS issues, but their operations and maintenance (O&M) were fully funded. He argued that cities should receive a long-term commitment for O&M funding, as residents were unfairly burdened with an annual $500,000 cost despite not contributing to the pollution. Mr. Tucker explained that OC was able to support its program by raising assessments, to which Director Lara responded that he would prefer an increase in RA to help cover O&M costs. Mr. Tucker emphasized that WRDSC operates as a collective and can only implement changes if the pumping community agrees to higher RA fees.

The discussion then shifted to concerns about representation within WRDSC. Director Rogers questioned why a temporary solution was put in place, pointing out that WRD altered the process after not liking the election results. Director Valencia suggested that having clear guidelines on BAC functions would be helpful. Mr. Tucker explained that WRD faced recruitment challenges in the past, and the new rules ensure equal representation from both the West Coast and Central Basin. However, SEWC directors expressed skepticism, with Director Martinez questioning the fairness of the current structure and asking why WRDSC and SEWC had different perspectives on what was equitable.

Mr. Nguyen clarified that after the election, there was still representation from the West Coast Basin, and he questioned the justification for increasing BAC membership from seven to thirteen. He emphasized that although the division between the West Coast and Central Basin is not visible, it is still significant. Mr. Nguyen and Mr. Cason called for a more transparent and fair process, with Mr. Nguyen stressing that genuine collaboration requires honesty and trust. Mr. Tucker acknowledged that small and medium pumpers lacked representation and

reiterated that BAC's role is only to make budget recommendations, not to approve budgets.

The conversation continued with Director Rogers highlighting that changing election outcomes undermines trust in WRDSC's decision-making. Director Avalos also voiced concerns that altering election results was unfair. Mr. Cason, who was actively involved in BAC recruitment, argued that if West Coast Basin members wanted better representation, they should have done the groundwork to elect their representatives. He and Mr. Nguyen ultimately sought clear answers from WRDSC.

As the meeting concluded, Director Valencia summarized SEWC's concerns and urged WRDSC to address them to maintain trust. She requested that WRDSC establish formal guidelines to prevent future frustrations and noted that SEWC cities look forward to further updates. Director Avalos reaffirmed the responsibility of serving the community and asked about the South Gate representative, to which it was confirmed that Director Calderon holds that position.

ITEM 7 – BOARD OF DIRECTORS COMMENTS

General comments were made by Board Members concluding with wishing everyone a Happy Valentines Day.

ITEM 8 – ADMINISTRATIVE ENTITY CHAIR/LEAD AGENCY COMMENTS

None.

ITEM 9 - ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

The next regular Southeast Water Coalition Board Meeting will be on April 3, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. at the Norwalk Arts & Sports Complex, Sproul Room, 13000 Clarkdale Avenue, Norwalk CA 90650.

Ana Valencia
Ana Valencia, Chair

4/3/25
Date