MINUTES OF THE SOUTHEAST WATER COALITION
REGULAR MEETING OF THE POLICY BOARD
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

A regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Southeast Water Coalition Joint Powers Authority was held on Thursday, December 5, 2024 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:

Chuong Vo	City of Cerritos
Todd Rogers	City of Lakewood
Ana Valencia	City of Norwalk
Isabel Aguayo	City of Paramount
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:

Derek Nguyen	City of Lakewood – AE
Anthony Manzano	City of Lakewood - AE
Glen Kau	City of Norwalk – AE
Chris Castillo	City of South Gate – AE
Ray Cordero	City of Whittier – AE
Kyle Cason	City of Whittier - AE
Jacque Koontz	Norwalk Staff
Michael Jea	Norwalk Staff
Madeline Anderson	SEWC Staff
Candice Lee	Richards Watson & Gershon
Cheryl Prowell	DTSC

Ajit Vaidya	DTSC
Brian Tripolone	DTSC
Shervin Milani	DTSC
Connor Shingai	DTSC

ITEM 2 – PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ITEM 3 - CONSENT CALENDAR

Director Rogers moved to approve the consent calendar.

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

AYES: **Vo, Rogers, Valencia, Aguayo, Avalos, Ybarra, Martinez**

NOES: **None.**

ABSTAIN: **None.**

ITEM 4 - WHITTIER NARROWS OPERABLE UNIT (WNOU) PRESENTATION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF TOXIC SUBSTANCES CONTROL (DTSC)

Mr. Kau began by providing context on the WNOU 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. Ajit Vaidya introduced his team and provided an overview of the impacts of their project on local cities. He explained the history of the San Gabriel Valley Superfund sites, which feature extensive groundwater contamination and are divided into six operable units (OUs). These sites, among the largest groundwater cleanups in California, were added to the National Priorities List (NPL) by the EPA in 1984. The contamination stems from activities such as chemical storage, metal cleaning, rocket manufacturing, and chemical recycling, with volatile organic compounds (VOCs) being the primary contaminants of concern.

Mr. Vaidya noted that the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit (WNOU), the southernmost portion of the San Gabriel Valley Superfund sites, covers two square miles of contaminated groundwater. Since the 1980s, significant cleanup efforts have been undertaken, with over $500 million leveraged in funding. In 2013, the EPA transferred financial responsibility for the WNOU to the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). To date, $27 million has been spent on the WNOU cleanup, with $7 million from DTSC and $20 million from the EPA.

Ajit explained the purpose of the WNOU's interim remedy to treat VOC contamination, contain the groundwater plume, prevent plume migration into the Central Basin, and protect downgradient drinking water wells. The project features include the Whittier Narrows Dam, groundwater extraction and treatment systems, extraction and monitoring wells, and water discharge to Legg Lake. These efforts have been largely effective, with no evidence of contaminants in the Central Basin wells for the past 5-10 years.

He noted that in early 2023, the Main San Gabriel Watermaster required DTSC to reduce the WNOU pumping rate from 2,000 gallons per minute (gpm) to 800 gpm due to limited water rights for discharging water into Legg Lake. This decision, which initially raised concerns for SEWC, is not expected to impact plume containment in the near term. Ajit highlighted a new project funded by Proposition 1 to address these challenges. The project aims to increase pumping rates, improve plume capture, and provide drinking water to local communities. A drinking water permit is scheduled for 2026, at which point DTSC plans to increase the WNOU pumping rate from 800 gpm to 2,800 gpm. Mr. Vaidya emphasized that obtaining this permit is critical to moving forward.

During the discussion, Director Martinez asked about the reasons for the reduced pumping rates. Mr. Vaidya explained that the Watermaster required the reduction due to statewide drought conditions in 2023, which imposed restrictions to preserve water for Legg Lake. Director Martinez noted that the drought has since been declared over and expressed concern about the age of the data used in the presentation. Mr. Vaidya confirmed that the most recent data is from 2022 and ongoing testing indicates no significant changes in plume conditions for 2023.

Director Martinez also acknowledged the challenges in obtaining permits and implementing the Proposition 1 project. Mr. Vaidya explained that while they began the permitting process over a year ago, the extensive documentation required has delayed progress. However, once the permit is secured, DTSC expects to increase the pumping rate. Mr. Vaidya concluded by committing to sharing the presentation with the AE.

Chair Valencia thanked DTSC for their update of WNOU activities. Before moving on to the next agenda item, she reminded Governing Board Members to submit their respective w-9s before leaving the meeting. As a courtesy, she offered copies for members to fill out and leave with Norwalk staff.

ITEM 5 - DISCUSSION/ACTION REGARDING FY 2023-24 AUDIT SERVICES UPDATE

Mr. Kau began by providing background on Norwalk posting the RFQ for an auditor and noted that SEWC received one quote by Price Paige & Company.

The original budget for an audit was set for $7,000 and Price Paige & Company provided a proposal for $8,280. Mr. Kau noted that the AE met and discussed that this was still an appropriate amount, and that the proposal should be brought to the Board for approval.

Director Vo moved to approve the following:

a. Authorize the City of Norwalk's Director of Finance, serving as SEWC Treasurer and Controller, to award a contract to Price Paige & Company to administer the annual audit of SEWC financial statements for FY 2023-24.

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

AYES: **Vo, Rogers, Valencia, Aguayo, Avalos, Ybarra, Martinez**

NOES: **None.**

ABSTAIN: **None.**

ITEM 6 - DISCUSSION/ACTION REGARDING SEWC FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO THE DIVISION OF DRINKING WATER (DDW) – HOLLYWOOD DISTRICT

Mr. Kau began by providing context regarding the history of issues with DDW and the progression with DDW after sending a letter. Mr. Kau then passed over the discussion to Mr. Nguyen.

Mr. Nguyen reminded the Board of the general improvements experienced after the original letter was sent to DDW but highlighted that issues with an engineer still continued. He explained that an engineer had relied on a portion of the code to create rules influenced by personal opinion. This was evident in the City of Lakewood, where additional restrictions were imposed. Lakewood sought legal advice, and the law firm concluded that the engineer's actions were inappropriate, as regulations and restrictions cannot be arbitrarily created. Mr. Nguyen emphasized that this constitutes regulatory overreach and stressed the importance of sending a follow-up letter to the new section chief at DDW. The proposed letter outlines the situation, underscores the severity of overreach, and requests cooperation to eliminate excessive permit requirements while discouraging further regulatory overreach.

Director Rogers pointed out that while the City of Lakewood is currently at the center of this issue, it could potentially affect any of the cities in the region. He reminded the Board of a similar issue previously encountered with the City of Pico Rivera. He then asked for clarification on whether or not the letter notes that there

will be legal consequences. Mr. Nguyen noted that it does clarify that legal consequences are part of the next steps.

Director Martinez acknowledged the relational nature of the situation and expressed a wish for alternative ways to address it. However, he voiced his support for the letter and indicated his understanding of the importance of this action.

Director Vo moved to approve the following:

a. Approve and send follow-up letter to Division of Drinking Water to address regulatory authority for water quality oversight and enforcement.

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

AYES: **Vo, Rogers, Valencia, Aguayo, Avalos, Ybarra, Martinez**

NOES: **None.**

ABSTAIN: **None.**

ITEM 7 - WATER REPLENISHMENT DISTRICT (WRD) BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BAC) LETTER

Mr. Kau provided context on the WRD Budget Advisory Committee and the change made by WRD in appointing additional members and dismantling of the Budget Advisory Committee. He continued by stating that two draft letters by AE members had been developed for the Board's consideration.

Director Martinez noted that the second letter is strongly worded, but Director Rogers offered a different perspective, expressing disappointment in WRD's actions. He noted that the behavior central to the pumpers' concerns is deeply frustrating. WRD had promised, agreed to, and implemented certain measures, only to reverse course.

Mr. Nguyen noted that WRD Budget Advisory Committee was formed out of a lawsuit and it is comprised of members of the pumping community to make sure that there is merit with rates. However, WRD recently decided to disband this committee and establish a new one composed of nominated members, including one representative from WRD. He criticized this approach as inherently biased.

Instead, WRD opted to create an ad-hoc committee, which held a meeting to move forward by appointing six new members from the West Coast Basin. Mr. Nguyen pointed out that this decision seems inequitable, as the West Coast Basin only represents 20% of the total basin and is financially responsible for just 20% of

the fees. He also raised concerns about the lack of disclosure regarding potential conflicts of interest.

Mr. Nguyen noted that he wrote the letter with a strong tone because he felt betrayed. Other members also noted that the whole situation felt very rushed.

In response, Director Rogers suggested finding a way to combine the strongest elements of the letters, emphasizing that the ultimate goal is to collaborate effectively with WRD.

Director Rogers made a motion to ask AE members and legal counsel to make edits and combine the elements of each letter.

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

AYES: **Vo, Rogers, Valencia, Aguayo, Ybarra, Martinez**

NOES: **None.**

ABSTAIN: **None.**

Director Avalos left the meeting at 8:15 PM.

ITEM 8 – BOARD OF DIRECTORS COMMENTS

None.

ITEM 9 – ADMINISTRATIVE ENTITY CHAIR/LEAD AGENCY COMMENTS

Mr. Kau addressed the question regarding the pumping and why it was reduced by noting that not everyone is technically off the drought conditions, so restrictions may still apply.

ITEM 10 - ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

The next regular Southeast Water Coalition Board Meeting will be on February 6, 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

2/6/25
Date