

MONTEREY COUNTY

WATER RESOURCES AGENCY

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January 15, 2025

Mr. David Stoldt
General Manager
Monterey Peninsula Water Management District
5 Harris Court, Building G
Monterey, CA 93940

SENT VIA EMAIL

SUBJECT: COMMENTS REGARDING PROPOSED ORDINANCE NO. 196

Dear Mr. Stoldt,

On behalf of the Monterey County Water Resources Agency (Agency), I write to express the Agency's concerns regarding the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District's (District) proposed Ordinance No. 196 to establish allocations of water from the yet completed Pure Water Monterey expansion project (PWMx). In particular, the Agency protests the characterization of the proposed allocation as a "...permanent replacement water supply..."¹. While we acknowledge the authority of the District to make this allocation, and appreciate the measured approach it proposes, we are concerned that Jurisdictions² of the District will make irreversible land use decisions that increase and harden water demand based upon the promise of an anticipated supply that is variable and subject to interruption and alternative use.

The Agency has been a strong and essential partner in the development of Pure Water Monterey. Waters made available by the Agency through an Agreement³ with the Monterey One Water (M1W) are the source of supplies for the PWM base project (PWMb), which began producing advanced treated water for injection into the Seaside Area Subbasin⁴ groundwater aquifer in 2020.

¹ Staff Report December 16, 2024, District Public Hearing, Agenda Item 10, First Reading of Ordinance No. 196.

² Political subdivisions served by the District include Carmel-by-the-Sea, a portion of the County of Monterey, Del Rey Oaks, Department of Defense sites, City of Monterey, the Monterey Peninsula Airport District, Pacific Grove, Sand City, and Seaside.

³ The 2015 Amended & Restated Water Recycling Agreement between the Agency and the Monterey One Water.

⁴ The Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin's Seaside Area Subbasin includes the coastal communities of Seaside and Marina as well as the western portion of the former Fort Ord. The western boundary is the extent of Quaternary sand dunes which form the shoreline of Monterey Bay. The northeast boundary is the 180/400-foot Aquifer Subbasin, which is in the Salinas Valley proper. The southeastern boundary is the Corral de Tierra subbasin.

These supplies have allowed CalAm⁵ to reduce its pumping from the Carmel River and comply with the terms and conditions of its water rights as established by the State Water Resources Control Board. While the Agreement assigns source supplies to PWMb, PWMx has no such committed supply; rather, it is intended to operate as a “peaker plant” to capture temporarily excess source supplies when available, typically in the winter months.

In addition to PWMx having no committed source of supply, the preponderance of source supplies available to PWMb under the Agreement are variable, prone to drought, and subject to changes in regulation and/or demand by the senior contractual water allocation holders – the Agency and the Marina Coast Water District. Essentially, the Agreement provides two types of water to PWMb: the first is “excess” wastewater dedicated to the Agency under agreements originating in the 1990’s and, second, is “New Incremental and Interruptible Allocations (New Source Water) – Phase I”, which are provided to M1W under water rights permits held by the Agency. The wastewater portion makes up more than half of the PWMb supply and nearly all the anticipated supply for PWMx. While there has been an historical reliability of the availability of wastewater for recycling under the Agreement, that reliability is subject to change⁶ for the purpose of curing seawater intrusion and other severe impacts of the groundwater imbalance in the Salinas Valley that threaten the sustainability of the 180/400-foot Aquifer Subbasin⁷. The State’s mandate under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act to achieve sustainability of the 180/400-foot Aquifer Subbasin by 2040 makes it highly likely that repurposing of some, if not all, of today’s supply of excess wastewater will occur in the next 5 to 15 years.

The mission of the Agency is to manage water resources sustainably while minimizing impacts from flooding for present and future generations. As water resource managers, we remain strongly committed to the Pure Water Monterey project and its continuing ability to enhance the Seaside Area Subbasin to provide the Monterey Peninsula vital drought resilience while avoiding the excess diversion of water from the Carmel River. While the District’s proposal to allocate only 371 acre-feet of the anticipated 2,250 acre-feet from PWMx, and to revisit conditions in five years, is measured, the Agency disagrees with the characterization of this potential water supply as permanent and invariable. Furthermore, the Agency cautions Jurisdictions that may receive this proposed allocation from making irreversible land use decisions based on the supply’s perceived availability. Rather, the Agency recommends Jurisdictions “bank” the proposed allocation in the Seaside Area Subbasin for the next drought that is sure to come or until future conditions become more certain, including the demonstrated reliability of the yet completed Pure Water Monterey

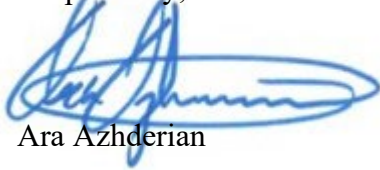
⁵ California American Water is a water supplier and the distributor of PWM supplies to the District’s Jurisdictions.

⁶ “It is understood and agreed that the wastewater committed by PCA [Pollution Control Agency now M1W], to which WRA [the Agency] is entitled pursuant to this Water Recycling Agreement, is dedicated for use by WRA for purposes of the CSIP [Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project] as that seawater intrusion project as it may exist from time to time, and thereafter for direct application for such other non-urban agricultural irrigation projects in the Salinas Valley as WRA may develop for the purpose of curing seawater intrusion and other severe impacts of the groundwater imbalance in the Salinas Valley which threaten the viability of the [180/400 ft.] groundwater basin as a water supply for agricultural and municipal uses, and for no other purpose.” [Agreement Sec. 5.03]

⁷ Situated in the northern region of Monterey County, the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin’s 180/400-foot Aquifer Subbasin encompasses Castroville, Salinas, and Gonzales. Most of the subbasin has a layered aquifer system with three aquifers separated by aquitards. The upper two aquifers have seawater intrusion, which is why the State categorized the subbasin as critically overdrafted, which requires early implementation of sustainability measures as mandated by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

expansion project. The Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency⁸ is currently updating the State mandated Groundwater Sustainability Plan for the 180/400-foot Aquifer Subbasin and aims to produce the next iteration in January 2027, which will provide much greater lucidity about the future demand of recycled water to protect this vital, natural resource. Please feel free to contact me directly at (831) 755-8982 or at azhderiana@countyofmonterey.gov if you should have any questions or wish to discuss further. We appreciate your consideration.

Respectfully,



Ara Azhderian

CC: The Honorable Senator, Alex Padilla
The Honorable Senator, Adam Schiff
The Honorable Representative, Zoe Lofgren
The Honorable Representative, Jimmy Panetta
The Honorable State Senator, John Laird
The Honorable State Speaker of the Assembly, Robert Rivas
The Honorable State Assemblymember, Dawn Addis
Erik Ekdahl, Deputy Director of the Division of Water Rights, California State Water Resources Control Board
Sonia De La Rosa, Administrative Officer, County of Monterey
Craig Spencer, Director of Housing and Community Development, County of Monterey
Remleh Scherzinger, General Manager, Marina Coast Water District
Paul Sciuto, General Manager, Monterey One Water Joint Powers Authority
Piret Harmon, General Manager, Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency

⁸ Established in 2017 under California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency is tasked with the ambitious goal of developing a comprehensive groundwater sustainability plan by 2020 and implementing the plan to achieve basin sustainability by 2040.