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NORA VARGAS
VICE-CHAIR
SUPERVISOR, FIRST DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA ITEM

06

DATE: September 14, 2022

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**REGIONAL WATER INFRASTRUCTURE ADDRESSING THE DROUGHT
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

As drought and climate change continue to intensify, our region's reliance on water sources will pose an increasing challenge. Advancement of drought management and water sustainability actions will require regional and binational collaboration to ensure that our residents, agricultural communities, and the economy continue to develop best practices.

This board letter includes actions for the Board of Supervisors (Board) to support an updated regional assessment and provide a timeline of proposed drought management & water infrastructure sustainability actions to identify County stormwater capture and reclamation opportunities and policies. Actions called for in the board letter will look at potential improvements to County-owned facilities and roads, and will incentivize affordable housing to utilize stormwater capture and reuse. Additionally, the board letter will enhance and support countywide programs that focus on stormwater capture incentives and enhance an educational campaign focused on water conservation programs.

I strongly urge your support for the recommendations in this letter to ensure that the Board takes a proactive approach to address the drought crisis through drought management & water infrastructure sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

VICE-CHAIR NORA VARGAS

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to return to the Board of Supervisors within a mid-year update (6 months) and a final report within 12 months after funding is received that focuses on an updated comprehensive regional assessment of current drought management & water infrastructure sustainability strategies which identifies availability in regional storm water reuse capacity and identifies metrics with a timeline to implement short-term and long-term infrastructure projects in regional facilities. This effort should:

SUBJECT: REGIONAL WATER INFRASTRUCTURE ADDRESSING THE DROUGHT

- a. Consider the whole region, including local municipalities, Imperial County, and binational cities.
 - b. Identify County stormwater capture and reclamation opportunities at County parks and facilities and return with recommendations for stormwater capture and reuse.
 - c. Identify recommendations for County roads and highways in collaboration with SANDAG and CalTrans for water diversion, capture and reuse.
 - d. Identify incentives for affordable housing developments to integrate and install stormwater capture and reuse systems.
 - e. Identify financial risks caused by extreme weather conditions caused by droughts, like floods and fires.
 - f. Identify financial investments needed for resilience approaches that reduce risks and impacts that are exacerbated by extreme weather conditions caused by droughts like floods and fires.
 - g. Research what other jurisdictions are doing with graywater reuse and provide a summary of best practices.
 - h. Align proposed recommendations with the California's Water Supply Strategy.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to expand outreach strategy efforts on the current stormwater capture incentives programs in San Diego County. Identify gaps and ways the County can expand and enhance programs by identifying funding mechanisms and guidelines for new pilot programs.
 3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to enhance existing educational campaigns to enhance messaging related to water conservation.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT:

As extreme weather conditions become more frequent due to climate change, it is critical that the County prioritizes drought management & water infrastructure sustainability. Our frontline communities, low-income communities, and communities of color, are disproportionately impacted by environmental injustices making them the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Income inequalities combined with limited water source threatens access to affordable water. Longer drought conditions create direct consequences for low-income communities and communities of color. Unaffordable water sources impact economic opportunities, access to quality drinking water, and food access. Today's proposed actions will ensure that regional efforts advance equity, address environmental and climate justice and leads to community adaptation and resilience.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Funds for this request are not included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 Operational Plan in the Land Use and Environment Group (LUEG). If approved, this request will result in estimated one-time costs of \$900,000. LUEG will need to identify funding prior to proceeding with the recommended action, as none is currently available. Once funding is identified, LUEG will return to the Board with a mid-year action to adjust the budget if necessary and/or incorporate in

SUBJECT: REGIONAL WATER INFRASTRUCTURE ADDRESSING THE DROUGHT

future budgets should funding become available. There may be future fiscal impacts based on recommendations resulting from today's action. Any such recommendations would return back for consideration and approval by the Board. At this time, there is no impact to net General Fund costs, and there will be no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT:

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT:

N/A

BACKGROUND:

The drought crisis in California has become longer and drier due to hotter weather conditions in recent years. San Diego imports about 80% percent of its water and relies heavily on the Colorado River. This dependency on imported water makes the San Diego region vulnerable to extreme drought conditions because it directly impacts the local water supply availability. Extreme changes in weather patterns prevent San Diego County from achieving a reliable water supply due to increasing temperatures and limited rainfall. Our frontline communities, low-income communities, and communities of color, are disproportionately impacted by environmental injustices making them the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Income inequalities combined with limited water sources threatens access to affordable water. Longer drought conditions have direct consequences on low-income communities and communities of color. Unaffordable water sources impact economic opportunities, access to quality drinking water, and food access. It is critical for the County of San Diego to work with local municipalities and binational cities like Tijuana, Tecate, Mexicali to implement climate resiliency efforts to proactively combat the consequences of the drought crisis in the region.

As a regional government agency, the County plays a key role in researching and identifying regional water infrastructure sustainability actions and strategies. Understanding the status of water supply investment, identifying current projects that can be implemented, and providing the funding needed to complete projects helps the region to seek grant funding opportunities from State and Federal agencies to implement projects. Moreover, being proactive in developing stormwater capture and infrastructure improvements and investments positions the County to take a leadership role in addressing droughts. Federal and State governments are taking historic actions to provide critical funding to address the drought crisis. The County has an opportunity to perform a similar critical function at the regional level.

The County of San Diego has invested in various programs that help the region address water reuse as a tool to enhance the region's local water supply. In 2018, the County of San Diego completed the Stormwater Capture and Use Feasibility Study that provided a County-wide analysis to determine the feasibility of planning, constructing, operating, and managing facilities that capture and beneficially use stormwater. San Diego county is paving the way with reuse investments through the East County Advanced Water Purification Program (ECAWP). ECAWP will create a local, sustainable, and drought-proof drinking water supply for East County residents. Additionally, the County has a capital project program for stormwater that involves green infrastructure. Green infrastructure uses natural processes to treat stormwater runoff with

SUBJECT: REGIONAL WATER INFRASTRUCTURE ADDRESSING THE DROUGHT

the primary goal of improving water quality and meeting requirements associated with the County's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit. While the primary purpose of these green infrastructure projects is to improve water quality, these projects can have co-benefits such as increasing stormwater retention, infiltration and increasing trees and green spaces in communities. The 2018 Stormwater Capture and Use Feasibility Study demonstrated that there are limited opportunities in the San Diego region to capture stormwater for reuse as a local water supply. However, when siting and designing green infrastructure projects, the County evaluates the potential for using these projects to capture and reuse stormwater where feasible.

The County also has multiple rebate and incentive programs for the unincorporated area that are implemented with the primary intent of improving water quality and meeting requirements of the MS4 Permit. Several of these programs also provide co-benefits related to local water supply enhancement and water conservation. For example, the County has a rain barrel incentive program that distributes rain barrels at a low cost to local residents. Rain barrels reduce water pollution by capturing rainwater runoff and preventing it from entering the MS4. The rainwater captured within rain barrels can also serve as a local water supply to help the region reduce its reliance on imported water supplies. Additionally, the County has a waterscape rebate program that incentivizes replacement of turf grass with drought-tolerant landscaping. This program improves water quality by reducing outdoor water irrigation, which is a major source of urban runoff that has the potential to pollute local waterways. The programs promote water conservation given that drought-tolerant landscaping uses much less water than traditional turf grass landscaping. The County's Green Building Incentive Program is designed to promote the use of resource efficient construction materials, water conservation features, and energy efficiency in new and remodeled residential and commercial buildings. Projects like the installation of graywater system in new development qualifies for County incentives under the Green Building Incentive Program. Although, multiple county programs and investments have been made for the unincorporated area, it is critical for the County of San Diego to be the leading agency in the region that spearheads innovative policy and infrastructure projects to address our most pressing drought needs.

The 2021-22 Grand Jury Report recently issued findings and recommendations related to reclaimed water for a sustainable future. Many of the recommendations in this board letter are supported by the findings of the Grand Jury report, including enhanced community outreach, and collaborating with small agencies to achieve reclaimed water use goals. This board letter highlights recommendations the County will take enhance capacity for water reuse in the region. Specifically, this board letter includes actions for the Board to support an updated regional assessment and provide a timeline of proposed drought management & water infrastructure sustainability actions to identify County stormwater capture and reclamation opportunities and policies. Actions called for in the board letter will look at potential improvements to County-owned facilities and roads and will incentivize affordable housing to utilize stormwater capture and reuse. Additionally, the board letter will enhance and support countywide programs that focus on stormwater capture incentives and enhance an educational campaign focused on water conservation programs.

I strongly urge you to support the recommendations in this letter to ensure that the Board takes a proactive approach to address the drought crisis faced by the County through this regional

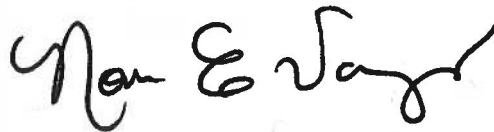
SUBJECT: REGIONAL WATER INFRASTRUCTURE ADDRESSING THE DROUGHT

assessment of drought management & water infrastructure sustainability actions to identify available storm water reuse capacity in regional facilities.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

The requested action supports the County's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan initiatives of Equity, Sustainability and Community as it is ensuring community resiliency through drought management & water infrastructure sustainability.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nora E. Vargas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

NORA VARGAS
Supervisor, First District

ATTACHMENT(S)

None