

Water Wrights

San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority April 9, 2020

By Don A. Wright

The San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority held its board of directors meeting by teleconference on Thursday, April 9, 2020. The meeting was on Zoom so I could see folks. I checked as much as I could to be sure I wasn't being filmed. If I failed I apologize for showing up in my pajamas. Chairman **Cannon Michael** was able to get the meeting up and running by 9:35am. Good for him. We couldn't have the pledge of allegiance to the flag so we took a moment of silence to pray for the folks working to keep the water flowing and the food growing.

Attorney **Rebecca Akroyd** called role and that took a bit of technical doings for all the different ways to participate and keep things from getting out of hand. You could call in on the phone or watch from your computer and muting and unmuting was solved. The role call revealed a quorum so the meeting was able to get started and take action.

Item 14 was removed, there was no public comment and the consent calendar was approved on voice vote but the action items will be taken by role.

Action Items

There was a slew of action items. The first being an update procurement policy and that required a new resolution. SLDMWA COO **Pablo Arroyave** and Akroyd gave the fiscal committee details. The changes will have no impact on established legal requirements and up to a \$200,000 single source was allowed. Westlands Water District GM **Tom Birmingham** asked if all the changes were circulated with the board and Akroyd said yes. He also questioned the provision of allowing the Executive Director and District Counsel to hire outside counsel. Akroyd said this provision was modeled after Valley Water's policy. There was more to it than that, lots more. There was a rather long discussion regarding the details but things were modified to meet the board's approval for hiring lawyers. **Jeff Cattaneo**, GM San Benito Water District questioned \$200,000 limit and Akroyd gave some examples of how budgets and expenses would be differentiated under the new guides and how they might impact change orders – which we all know can be money makers for some contract providers. Eventually there were five changes to the policy and the board approved.

The next item dealt with extraordinary maintenance costs to rewind the pumps at the Jones Pumping Plant. There was a negotiation with the US Bureau of Reclamation to get it to pay up front and allow the Authority to reimburse the government. The resolution passed.



Some have called the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District the smog Nazis. Not me. The SJVAPCD is looking to give the SLDMWA a grant for electric vehicles. The board approved applying for the grant.

Assistant Executive Director **Frances Mizuno** is still participating. That's nice for everyone but perhaps her. She presented the request for the board to adopt the CEQA finding of the long-term water transfer from north to south of Delta. There was a long history of developing the CEQA finding that involved court cases and monitoring programs to prevent impacts such as subsidence and impacts to the giant garter snake. There were comments as late as this week but they were redundant comments from years ago. There was an assertion the EIR was void in its entirety due to having to modify the original EIR. The commenter wanted SLDM to start from scratch but courts have ruled over and over again against this action. The board approved and I ran out of time to complete this meeting.

One thing I noticed in this meeting was the amount of time and detail some of the items engendered. Get me straight here; I'm not criticizing anyone for taking enough time to get to the bottom line. One item took more than 45-minutes alone. I don't recall a single item ever taking that long before, and I've been attending SLDM meetings for a while. There is good reason for directors to make informed decisions, they are protecting their constituents and that's what they are supposed to do.

But from a communication standpoint I can't help but wonder if the participants' location may have contributed to the deep dive into a pressgang of resolution wording. I think most of us were at home. I got up and made myself something to eat and it didn't seem to make the meeting go any faster or slower. If I was in a crowded boardroom the sense of time, especially other people's time would be perhaps be more acute. I'm just postulating having a remote verses communal meeting may slow things down due to a lack of peer pressure to wrap things up. This may be a boon to continuing remote meetings after the coronavirus pandemic. I like saving gas but miss the opportunities to meet new people and strengthen relationships. But if a meeting takes a little longer at least there are opportunities when working from home unavailable in a traditional boardroom setting.

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SAN LUIS & DELTA-MENDOTA WATER AUTHORITY was established in January of 1992 and consists of approximately 2,100,000 acres of 29 federal and exchange water service contractors within the western San Joaquin Valley, San Benito and Santa Clara counties. The governing body of the Authority consists of a 19-member Board of Directors classified into five divisions with directors selected from within each division. The main conveyance is the Delta-Mendota Canal that delivers approximately 3,000,000-acre feet of water within the Authority service area. Of this amount, 2,500,000-acre feet are delivered to highly productive agricultural lands, 150,000 to 200,000-acre feet for municipal and industrial uses, and between 250,000 to 300,000 acre-feet are delivered to wildlife refuges for habitat enhancement and restoration.

Board - Chairman: Cannon Michael,

Staff - Executive Director: Federico Barajas, Assistant Executive Director: Still listed as Frances Mizuno, COO: Pablo Arroyave, Attorney: Becca Ackroyd.

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