



San Gorgonio Pass Water Agency

FILE

A California State Water Project Contractor
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Mr. Don Rapp, Foreperson
Riverside County Grand Jury
P. O. Box 829
Riverside, CA 92502

Dear Mr. Rapp:

The San Gorgonio Pass Water Agency has received and reviewed the Grand Jury Report—Riverside County Water and Sanitation Districts, Compensation and Transparency. The Agency and its Board of Directors appreciate the work of the Grand Jury and the vital role it plays in investigating public agencies to mitigate or eliminate the possibility of the misuse of public funds.

Per the California Penal Code section 933(b), the Agency submits this letter in response to the Grand Jury's report.

Grand Jury Finding No. 1:

The Agency is in general agreement with the finding that some Riverside County water agencies provide benefits to their elected board of directors, and that state law has established the maximum amount of a stipend that a director may receive for attending meetings.

Grand Jury Finding No. 2:

The Agency is in general agreement that most Riverside County water agencies have web sites that provide information about the water agency, including public documents.

Grand Jury Finding No. 3:

The Agency is in general agreement that many Riverside County water agencies hold their meetings during the day.

Grand Jury Recommendation One:

The Agency disagrees with this recommendation. The recommendation assumes that insurance benefits for Agency board members are paid from revenues derived from water rates. In fact, the Agency does not provide insurance benefits to its Directors. The Agency provides a very limited reimbursement to Directors for medical expenses not covered by insurance. Further, and more important, funds used to pay for this benefit do not derive from income from wholesale water rates but rather from income from general tax revenues. Thus, a reduction in this benefit would not impact the Agency's wholesale water rate at all. The Agency will post this information on its web site (see response to Recommendation Two below).

In order to keep Director compensation costs down, the Agency Board has voted in four of the last ten years to decline a 5% stipend increase allowed by law. In addition, last year the Board voted to limit future stipend increases to the Cost of Living adjustment provided to staff each year, if any, up to a maximum of 5%. Finally, even though State law allows Directors to be paid for up to ten meetings per month, the Agency restricts its Board members to a maximum of five meetings per month. These actions show a history of the Agency keeping Director compensation to a minimum.

Grand Jury Recommendation Two:

The Agency agrees with this recommendation. While the Agency has a great deal of useful information on its web site, additional useful information can be added that will have the effect of making the Agency more transparent. The Agency is in the process of adding additional information, such as Board member stipend and benefit data, the General Manager's salary and benefits, the General Manager's contract, Board-approved policies, and other similar information. In addition, the Agency will make this information easy to find on the web site. The Agency anticipates that the web site will be upgraded with these improvements within the next 30 days.

Grand Jury Recommendation Three:

The Agency disagrees with this recommendation. The Agency has previously held public meetings in the evening and did so with the specific intent of increasing attendance. There were no changes in attendance on the part of the public as a result of these evening meetings. Further, the Grand Jury report provides no evidence that attendance is likely to increase as a result of holding evening meetings.

Transparency has traditionally meant providing information to the public, not necessarily holding meetings at a time when some believe that the public might be more likely to attend. Through its web site, the Agency provides notice of all its public meetings, along with agendas and attachments. These are easily accessible to anyone with access to a computer and the Internet. In addition, the Agency sends the complete agenda package for each public meeting out to a distribution list via email. Any person or entity can request to be added to this distribution list. There are currently nearly fifty people on this list.

In the past, when the Agency has included on its agenda a controversial issue, attendance has increased, sometimes significantly, indicating that attendance increases with public interest, not with the time of public meetings. The Agency can hold workshops on controversial issues in the evening if in the Board's discretion it feels that doing so would increase attendance even further.

As a result of this Grand Jury report, the Agency is exploring adding a feature to its web site that would enable any member of the public who wished to make a public comment to the Board to do so via email in addition to doing so in person at a Board meeting. This would increase the ability of the public to provide input to the Agency and its Board of Directors prior to a Board meeting.

The Agency appreciates this opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury. Should the Grand Jury have any questions about the Agency, its response to the Grand Jury report, or other matters, the Agency welcomes such inquiries at any time.

Very truly yours,



John Jeter
President