

SCMU Review

(schmoo ri-vyoo) n. items of interest and information from your Santa Cruz Municipal Utilities

No.72 FALL 2021 SANTA CRUZ MUNICIPAL UTILITIES 212 LOCUST STREET, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060 (831)420-5220 scmu@cityofsantacruz.com

Director's Message



GREETINGS,
SCMU REVIEW
READERS!

Water Director Rosemary Menard has stepped away from the Water Department to fill in as interim City Manager. She'll be back, but in her absence, I'm filling in as interim Water Director.

I've been with the Water Department for over 20 years, serving as Deputy Director and Engineering Manager for the past eight.

As Manager of Engineering, I've been part of the ambitious program of work the Department has undertaken to modernize our infrastructure and set a course for the future. Some of the projects are complete; some are underway; some are still a ways off. They're all part of years-long planning efforts to bring infrastructure built for the needs of the twentieth century up to speed with the needs of the twenty-first century.

You see, planning plays a vital role in managing a utility that a community depends on 24/7/365. Not only are we responsible to solve day-to-day challenges inherent in providing 98,000 people with reliable drinking water, we're also responsible to solve future challenges, too.

In this issue of the SCMU Review you'll learn about the role that planning plays in ensuring that you have safe water coming out of your tap today, and safe water coming out of your kid's tap when they have kids.

I'm a wonky introverted engineer, by profession. I suppose I'm pretty nerdy and introverted personally, too. But please don't let that stop you from reaching out to me with any questions or concerns that you have about your drinking water while I serve as your interim Water Director.

Heidi Luckenbach

Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail



Principal Planner Sarah Easley Perez with some recently completed plans.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN FAMOUSLY SAID "FAILING TO PLAN IS PLANNING TO FAIL" and that's certainly true when it comes to operating a utility that the community depends on. We've all experienced periods without electricity — which is no fun. It's even less fun not to have water: you can't flush your toilet, wash your hands, brush your teeth, or wet down that pesky cowlick.

We spend a ton of time planning at the Water Department. Plans serve as the foundation for our work. There's nothing random about what we do (other than the mention of cowlicks). We're responsible to provide a critical life-sustaining service 24/7/365 and it's a responsibility that we plan weeks, months, and years ahead for. (Sometimes even decades.)

The most critical plans we make are regarding the supply, treatment, and distribution of water. (And of course, how we'll protect the sources from which the water originates.)

These are the granddaddies of plans for our core services, often years (sometimes decades) in the making. These plans include obvious things like big infrastructure projects, and less obvious, but equally important plans, like how we'll pay for projects and services, how we'll communicate important service information to our customers, and how we'll continue to provide reliable service during natural disasters like floods or earthquakes.

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IN SEARCH OF THE ELUSIVE UNICORN

Water Supply Planning

"AND THE AWARD FOR THE LONGEST PLANNING PROCESS IN SANTA CRUZ WATER DEPARTMENT HISTORY GOES TO ... *drumroll* ... SUPPLY PLANNING!"
No surprise there.

In 1976–77 Santa Cruz experienced the worst drought in the city's history, with 1977 being the driest year on record for the entire state of California. Santa Cruz, which gets 100 percent of its drinking water from local rainfall (we import no water from anywhere else), was particularly vulnerable to the effects of drought. While water shortages weren't rare, none had been seen at the level of 1977. Planning for new supply began in earnest.

Since that time, many supply ideas and plans have come and gone — each with something that some in the community couldn't live with. Typically those somethings are related to the environment or cost. Examples of prior supply projects that were considered and dismissed include a proposal for a new reservoir on Zayante creek, and a desalination plant. However the need for supplemental supply during dry years has only grown, particularly with the increased impacts of climate change.

In an effort to find a **unicorn supply project** — one that can produce enough water, have acceptable environmental impacts, be affordable, and supported by the broad community, the City established a citizen-led Water Supply Advisory Committee (WSAC) in 2014.

WSAC was made up of representatives from all areas of our community, and their charge was to come up with recommendations to augment the City's supply that was **agreeable to all interests** in the community.

After 18 months of a very deep dive into the workings of the City's water system and reviewing over 100 ideas that came from the community, the WSAC came up with recommendations that were unanimously supported by City Council:

- Increase water conservation
- Share and bank excess winter water in local depleted aquifers
- Use purified recycled water to replenish aquifers
- Implement desalination

For the past six years, the Water Department has studied and tested the feasibility of all of the recommendations, concurrently.

We're now ready to begin implementing supply projects and a final plan will go the Council for review and approval in 2022.



Alphabet Soup: UWMP and WSCP

WE UNDERSTAND THAT NOT EVERYONE IS AS EXCITED by a good planning process as we are. But we have some new plans that really are worth getting excited about. OK, maybe not "excited" per se, but at least worth being interested in.

Those plans are the new Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP) and Water Shortage Contingency Plan (WSCP).

Why are they worth paying attention to? Because the **Urban Water Management Plan** describes our long-term plan to ensure that we have adequate water resources to meet existing and future needs. The **Water Shortage Contingency Plan**, on the other hand, plans responses to various water shortage conditions like drought, earthquakes, fires, or other catastrophic events.

Both of these plans are required by the State of California.

If you're still yawning and not convinced that these plans merit your time, here's something that may get your attention: as framed in the WSCP, in a Stage 5 water shortage, you would be rationed to 50 percent of your baseline (2013) use. Right now in 2021, we've asked for a 10 percent cutback. And we know *that's* been hard enough for many of our customers.

Both the Urban Water Management Plan and the Water Shortage Contingency Plan can be found on our website on the "Online Reports" page.

www.cityofsantacruz.com/government/city-departments/water/online-reports-4326

The Water Supply Advisory Committee was made up of representatives from all areas of our community.



New State Laws Help Our Environment



MUCH CLEARER DISPOSAL INFORMATION FOR WET WIPES IS COMING TO A SHELF NEAR

you! After years of legislative work, AB 818 has been signed into law by the Governor. This bill establishes the strongest “Do Not Flush” wipes labeling and public education requirements in the country.

Starting in July 2022, all wet wipes packages are required to include the “Do Not Flush” symbol and warning. This is a huge win for consumers, the environment, infrastructure and our City Wastewater System!

Despite the rigorous preventive wastewater system maintenance we conduct, our Wastewater Treatment Facility team removes 20,000 pounds of grit and rags including wipes each week before wastewater can be processed — the new law intends to change this. Look for the “Do Not Flush” symbol starting in July and meantime, remember: only human waste and toilet paper may be flushed; trash everything else — even those so-called “flushable” wipes!

Governor Newsom also recently signed AB 1276 which expands the straws-upon-request law to include more single-use food accessories, more food facilities, and third-party delivery platforms — including food that is taken away,



delivered, or served on-site. Providing food and beverage accessories only upon request to customers is a win-win-win that simultaneously empowers consumer choice, reduces waste before it’s created, and saves businesses and local governments money.

The City predates the State on this. Our “Skip the Stuff” ordinance dates back to 2017 and was strengthened in 2020 with effective date of March 9, 2022.

280 Clean Ocean Businesses Honored

IN CELEBRATION OF SEPTEMBER’S RECENT POLLUTION PREVENTION

Week, the City recognized 280 Clean Ocean Business awardees. The efforts of these local businesses have protected the San Lorenzo River, Monterey Bay and local creeks through practices that keep pollutants away from both storm drains and the sewer system.

The City’s Environmental Compliance program annually honors local food service as well as vehicle service facilities that have been consistent recipients of **Clean Ocean Business** awards for at least five years.

This year’s awardees include 32 restaurants and one vehicle service facility that have been recipients for over 10 years, and three that have been recipients for over five years.

The complete list of Clean Ocean Businesses is available at www.cityofsantacruz.com/cleanoceanbusiness.



“Many thanks to the important practices of these Clean Ocean Businesses,” said Environmental Compliance and Wastewater Lab Manager Akin Babatola. “We are especially grateful that they were able to stay the pollution prevention course, despite the economic challenges of Covid-19.”



Changes Coming for Annual Newsletter

PUBLIC WORKS’ RESOURCE RECOVERY DIVISION IS COMMITTED TO INCREASING WASTE REDUCTION citywide. In this effort there will be a new look and feel to the annual *Refuse & Recycling* newsletter in 2022.

Refuse & Recycling will arrive in your mailbox as a newsprint mailer, without an envelope. The loose coupons for Bulky Item or Extra Bag collection will be replaced by a cut out and/or call in option.

Look for it the first week of January.



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> Failing to Plan... from page 1

There are state and federally required plans, too. For example, the state requires us to produce an Urban Water Management Plan every five years.

We just completed the 2020 plan, which took well over a year and came in at over 3,000 pages. We also just completed a new Water Shortage Contingency Plan, also required by the state, also taking more than a year to complete.

We've been working with federal regulators on a plan to support endangered fish species for over two decades. More on these plans later.

All this is to say that if we can plan for it, chances are we have. Projected growth? It's included in our supply plans. New water contaminants? We have a treatment plan. Earthquake at the Newell Creek Dam? We've got an emergency plan ready to go. Pandemic? Well, that one caught us off guard. But not for long! Did you ever turn on your tap in 2020 and not have clean, safe, reliable water? No, we didn't think so.

And should we ever have to suffer through a year like 2020 again, we've got a plan.

Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

WE'VE BEEN WORKING WITH STATE AND FEDERAL REGULATORS ON A PLAN TO HELP ENDANGERED AND THREATENED FISH SPECIES FOR OVER TWO DECADES.

Yes, over two decades. We share our water sources with critically endangered coho salmon, and with threatened steelhead trout (as well as other species like lamprey, western pond turtle, California red-legged frog, tidewater goby, etc.). Both coho and steelhead need particular conditions to survive at particular times of the year — all of which involve varying levels of stream flow and functioning instream and riparian habitat, resulting in complex formulas involving many different interests.

In a community that gets 95 percent of its water from surface water sources, where these species live, finding the balance between meeting the needs of the fish and meeting the needs of water customers is very challenging.

Many cities across California are suing regulators in an effort to not be forced to share their drinking water with fish. In Santa Cruz, we value our natural resources so we've taken a different approach — which is to include environmental water needs in our supply planning and share enough water with fish to enable their recovery.

We're in the home stretch with regulators to finalize a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP — more alphabet soup) which will codify our commitment to providing improved stream flow, as well as to protecting the habitat in our drinking water source rivers and creeks that these special species need.



We share our water sources with critically endangered coho salmon, like this juvenile seen here.