



**Monterey County Water Resources Agency  
Board Strategic Planning Workshop  
Held January 24, 2024**

**April 2024**





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## Workshop Report

The Monterey County Water Resources Agency (Agency) Board of Directors held a strategic planning workshop from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday, January 24, 2024, at the Laguna Seca Hospitality Pavilion in Salinas. The workshop provided an opportunity for Board members and Agency staff to learn more about each other, reflect on effective governance practices, review and update the Board's strategic plan, clarify goals for the coming year, and strengthen teamwork. This report contains a summary of the results of the workshop.

Christine Butterfield with Baker Tilly facilitated the workshop.

### ***Workshop Overview***

#### **Agenda**

- Welcome
- Review agenda, objectives, ground rules
- Icebreaker exercise
- Characteristics of effective governing bodies
- Refresher on strategic plan components
- Staff presentation of strategic plan goals and progress
- Public comment
- General Manager's vision for success
- Interview themes
- Discuss and prioritize goals
- Public comment
- Wrap-up and next steps

#### **Objectives**

- Review and discuss governance roles and strengthen teamwork.
- Review and update the Board's strategic plan.
- Discuss and clarify Board goals for the coming year.

## Participants

### *Board Members*

- Mike LeBarre, Chair; by City Selection Committee
- Matthew Simis, Vice Chair; by Grower-Shipper Association
- Mark Gonzalez; by District 1 Supervisor Luis Alejo
- Mike Scattini; by District 2 Supervisor Glenn Church
- Marvin Borzini; by District 3 Supervisor Chris Lopez
- Deidre Sullivan; by District 4 Supervisor Wendy Root-Askew
- Ken Ekelund; by District 5 Supervisor Mary Adams
- John Baillie; by Ag. Advisory Committee
- Jason Smith; by Monterey County Farm Bureau

### *Staff Presenters*

- Ara Azhderian, General Manager
- Kelly Donlon, Assistant County Counsel
- Shaunna Murray Deputy General Manager
- Nan Kim, Finance Manager
- Jessell Fenley, Administrative Services Assistant
- Jason Demers, Senior Water Resources Engineer
- Mark Foxworthy, Senior Water Resources Engineer
- Elise Ramirez, Senior Water Resources Engineer
- Amy Woodrow, Senior Water Resources Hydrologist
- Lorena Imperial, Acting Board of Directors Clerk

## Workshop Preparation

In preparation for the workshop, Christine conducted individual interviews with Board members, prepared an agenda and other materials, and reviewed the workshop plan with the General Manager and Deputy General Manager.

## ***Opening Comments***

The workshop began with a welcome by Board Vice-Chair Simis and General Manager Ara Azhderian, who thanked everyone for attending. He offered some opening comments about why the workshop was important, and what he hoped the group would gain from the day's discussions. Then Ara introduced Christine Butterfield, who reviewed the workshop agenda, objectives, and ground rules for a successful priority-setting session.

## Bike Rack

Christine explained that items that were brought up but would not be discussed today would be added to a bike rack, for future attention. The items that were added to the bike rack are listed below.

- Salinas River Stream Maintenance Program
- Pajaro River Management Program
- Water rates discussion



## Icebreaker Exercise

Christine led the group in an icebreaker exercise. The purpose of this activity was to kick off the workshop informally and to learn more about each other. Each Board member was asked to respond to the icebreaker, *how has serving on the board of the water agency influenced how you view and think about water?* A summary of Board member input is provided below.

- Served as staff, now board
- It's hard to get things done in a government environment
  - Planning involved
  - How vital community input is to conversations about water
- Learned the high cost of projects
- "Value of water"
- I don't take water for granted
- "...water is worth fighting for"
- Since '30s, we have been fighting saltwater intrusion
- Lots of hurdles in managing water. Sometimes it feels like the government stands in the way of our work.
- Reminds us how important good leadership and good planning are to the effectiveness of our agency.

- Surprised by our added role and duties tied to emergency management
- Tough to get things done with government due to the complexity

## ***Effective Governing Bodies***

Following the icebreaker exercise, the group engaged in a discussion about good governance, roles and responsibilities. The purpose of the discussion was to share perspectives and ideas for effectively serving as a team, and to set the foundation for a productive and fulfilling year. It served as a short refresher on roles, responsibilities, and good governance practices.

Christine provided an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the Water Resources Agency Board of Supervisors and Board of Directors. She posed several questions to the group. The questions and a summary of the responses that were offered are listed below.

### **What is going well?**

- Transparency
- Communication
- Teamwork
  - Board of Directors works well together
  - Board of Directors has high-quality relationships with staff
- The agency is better than it has ever been
- Recent staffing changes have positioned the organization well

### **What could be improved?**

- Improve influence of Board of Directors
  - We can say things that staff, and the Board of Supervisors cannot say
  - Consider a process to enhance influence
- Agency is complex from projects to staff training
  - How do we get on the same page and agree upon “the problem,” and develop a campaign to influence stakeholders outside the agency?
- Bring together north and south County needs and interests
- More communication between staff and the Board
  - Stakeholders sound out of the loop
- Things would be easier with more money
- Restart Water Forum with Board of Supervisors
- Refer to science for future discussions and planning
- Include the public in the conversations tied to policy changes

### **What else would improve the Board's ability to govern?**

- Independence from the Board of Supervisors
- More future-looking documents
  - What's ahead on the staff's project list?
  - This would help us sell projects
- "We are living in fear" of claims and litigation
- Have staff stay in their areas of expertise and align projects with staff expertise
- Utilize assets better.

## ***Strategic Planning***

Following a brief stretch break, the group spent time reviewing the value of strategic planning and strategic planning best practices. Christine reviewed the Agency's current vision, mission, organizational values, and multi-year goals as shown below.

### **Vision Statement**

Be recognized throughout the region as a leader in water resource management through demonstrated knowledge, integrity and the quality of our actions.

### **Mission Statement**

Manage water resources sustainably while minimizing impacts from flooding for present and future generations.

## Organizational Values

### Leadership

- Set a positive example for others in water resources management and flood control through our knowledge, integrity, and actions.

### Stewardship

- Operate with financial and environmental responsibility so the Agency continuously succeeds.

### Transparency

- Work in ways that are easily understood by stakeholders and the public, communicating effectively about Agency decisions, actions, resources, and progress.

### Integrity

- Act with openness, honesty, and consistency, showing no favoritism and utilizing professional standards for decision making.

### Public service

- Work in a way that brings pride upon the Agency, showing that we care about quality and safety, are accountable, think long term, and provide excellent service to the community we serve.

### Collaboration

- Work with stakeholders and related organizations to advance our mission and vision.

## Multi-Year Goals



## Accomplishments and Challenges

Christine shared some recent accomplishments and challenges that were mentioned during the individual interviews, as they relate to the Agency’s strategic plan. She then asked the group if anything was missing and should be added to the list. The accomplishments and challenges that were suggested are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Recent Accomplishments and Challenges*

Accomplishments	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recruitment of the new General Manager</li> <li>○ Dedicated and capable staff</li> <li>○ Progress with flood recovery activities</li> <li>○ Progress with ongoing operations and maintenance activities</li> <li>○ Secured money from a variety of sources</li> <li>○ Maintain reserves</li> <li>○ Staff continues to make progress and pursue funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Project costs continue to rise</li> <li>○ Lack of authority to approve resources to fund projects</li> <li>○ Volume and complexity of other government agencies involved in water resources and clarity roles</li> <li>○ Difficult to communicate the agency’s challenges to the public</li> <li>○ Some legislation may not apply to the Agency due to smaller population</li> <li>○ Self-funded agencies do not receive State and Federal money</li> <li>○ Press reports have not reflected the Agency’s needs (inaccurate information)</li> <li>○ Staff is overwhelmed</li> <li>○ State and Federal mandates burn staff time and add time to projects</li> <li>○ There is lack of agreement among stakeholders about who pays for what</li> </ul>

## Progress on Strategic Plan Goals and Strategies

The Agency is closing out year three of the existing strategic plan. Staff presented on progress that has been made to the implementation of the strategic plan’s goals and strategies, many of which build on what had been accomplished in years one and two. Implementation challenges that were presented included a high number of winter storm activities and significant staff turnover and vacancies.

## General Manager’s Observations

While the group took a break for lunch, General Manager Ara Azhderian offered some comments about the Agency’s mission and ways to achieve the mission. He suggested a three-pronged approach to achieving the mission, which includes the following three objectives:

- Maintain service and system reliability,
- Recruit, retain, and reward quality staff, and
- Ensure financial sustainability.

The group had an opportunity to comment on the General Manager’s presentation about achieving the Agency’s mission. The following comments were shared:

- I like the concept of “de-obligating” some of the Agency’s projects.
- Employee orientation with the support of the human resources team on the role of the Agency.
- The General Manager’s remarks shine a light on the need to engage the community sooner rather than later.

### ***Interview Themes***

Christine reviewed the themes from the Board interviews, as they related to goals for the next two years. The slide that was presented is shown below.

#### **Board Interview Theme Goals for 2024 and 2025**

- Establish a **financial sustainability plan**
- Explore **water rate updates**
- Initiate **spillway improvements**
- Develop a plan to **manage/mitigate saltwater intrusion**
- Monitor **claims and litigation**
- Explore new ways to **engage the Board of Supervisors** about key water resources and infrastructure needs
- Develop strategy to **communicate** the accomplishments of the agency
- Strategically **engage stakeholders** and community members
- Offer the Board more **trainings, tours** of the agency’s facilities and infrastructure and **on boarding** opportunities
- Review and update **bylaws**



### ***Proposed Goals***

The group reviewed and discussed seven proposed goals for the next two years. The discussion about the goals included sharing success indicators for each. A summary of the discussions regarding each goal is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Goal Discussions

Goal	Summary of Discussion
<p><b>1. Recycled water system master planning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimized Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project (CSIP)</li> <li>• CSIP expansion – maximize the diversion facility</li> <li>• Priorities are as follows:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Treated water</li> <li>○ River water</li> <li>○ Well water</li> </ul> </li> <li>• We understand what goes in and what comes out and it adds up</li> <li>• Successful financial and flow audit results to improve information regarding what is going on</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Project feasibility studies to address seawater intrusion/groundwater sustainability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of projects to start the funding process</li> <li>• Reduce seawater intrusion</li> <li>• CSIP expansion</li> <li>• Extraction barrier</li> <li>• Good science that is well vetted and reviewed</li> <li>• This is a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA)-led project, so we need to work with them</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Condition assessments of facilities to support capital replacement and improvement plan</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficiency may increase if we keep the river clean</li> <li>• Create a capital improvement plan (CIP) list that shows how well we are doing</li> <li>• Create and maintain a checklist of projects and needed investments</li> <li>• This is a work in progress. We need to plan better.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Relationship building with other water resources agencies</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly General Manager-Chair meetings to build relationships</li> <li>• Continue building on this</li> <li>• Water agency general managers work well together</li> <li>• Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) connection must be used</li> <li>• Agency partners with other agencies to advance initiatives of mutual benefit</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Public information and community engagement plan</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated staff person</li> <li>• Stakeholders can clearly articulate what the Agency is doing and where it is headed so they support the direction</li> <li>• We will need a staff person for this</li> <li>• Community support of Proposition 218 funding</li> <li>• Need to get funding first</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Funding strategies and implementation plan</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisit meters and price per acre-foot</li> <li>• Use Proposition 218 funds for the dam repair</li> <li>• Regional consensus</li> <li>• Use it, pay for it</li> <li>• Charge extraction fee</li> <li>• Ensure that the Agency has the funds to address its priorities</li> </ul>

Goal	Summary of Discussion
<b>7. Legislative platform and engagement strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State/federal grants for dam repairs. Explore grant writers</li><li>• Lobbyist</li><li>• Educate government officials on Monterey County water issues at the federal and state level</li><li>• Hire dedicated/specialized staff to respond to environmental regulations</li><li>• Staying involved with local legislative committees</li><li>• Maintain a presence at the state and federal level</li></ul>

### ***Wrap-Up and Next Steps***

To wrap up, Christine summarized key agreements and commitments from the day. She explained that Baker Tilly would prepare this summary report. The participants completed workshop evaluation forms, which are summarized in the attachment to this report.

### **Closing Comments**

To conclude the workshop, each workshop participant offered a key takeaway from the day's discussions. The comments that were offered are listed below.

- There was good information. I liked each department's presentations. It is encouraging to see new people.
- I liked the department presentations and Ara's vision remarks. Everyone did a good job.
- This was one of the better workshops!
- I liked the meeting and Shaunna's kickoff.
- I liked the workshop approach and enjoyed the staff presentations. I like to see all the employees hired!
- This was one of the better Board meetings, great meeting.
- I love that staff attended. Shaunna did an amazing job. Thank you, Ara.
- Everyone sees the big picture.

## Attachment: Workshop Evaluation

### Monterey County Water Goals and Prioritization Workshop Held January 24, 2024

### Workshop Evaluation



#### The **best thing** about this workshop was...

- Informative at a higher level
- Seeing the big picture – hearing from a number of different staff
- Including staff and the way the presentation was set up
- Review of strategic plan components
- Staff in control
- Interaction
- Board and staff meeting together – board working together to get on the same page
- No wasted time
- Christine ran a good show – professional
- That the session concentrated on strategy and goals and did not evolve into a task list
- Reading the proposed goals and road to success in the next several years
- Hearing about different projects directly from staff
- The presentations from a wide variety of staff, as well as the goal setting
- Getting to hear the directors say nice things about us – interactive activities
- Presentations given by management
- Hearing the perspectives of the board – the PowerPoint was very engaging
- Seeing everyone in person – good discussion on priorities and goals
- Got to see the process

#### Some thing(s) which **could have been better**...

- Sound – hard to hear when directors are facing away from the audience
- Continue to include board officers – very informative
- Setup of room was not practical – did not like that the board had their backs to us
- Set up of board members' backs – should have been facing the staff and public
- “hot” coffee – different location
- Breakout groups are sometimes useful
- In-depth goal discussion – what can be done and steps towards the goal
- More microphones to hear speaker better

- Maybe more activities that involve standing up and interacting
- More bonding, volume
- Wish the board faced the audience – hard to hear at times
- Lunch

**What elements of the session will be most useful to you?**

- Review of accomplishments
- The prioritization process in laying out a path forward
- How information was organized
- Was not overly involved and allowed staff to run the show
- Hearing about the different WRA departments – seeing where we are on the same page
- The strategy examples from staff in the morning were very good – please keep doing that
- Good planning for the future – kind of know where we are going, yet flexible
- Knowing there is momentum and board member support for the Agency’s direction and current strategic plan momentum
- Strategic planning and goals for the Agency
- The final goals the board settled on
- The presentations from staff were very informative and helped staff gain knowledge and perspective
- Interactive activities – getting staff together
- Learning about the Agency’s plans for the future
- The values of empowering us to look forward – focus on vision and mission statements
- Networking and hearing other people’s perspectives on topics

**I’m glad that the facilitator(s)...**

- Kept the presentations moving
- Had each board member speak
- Allowed staff to lead presentations
- Were clear, nice - seems to know what she’s talking about
- Tracked and documented the meeting well
- Christine did a great job!
- Very good
- Kept everyone involved
- Kept the discussions focused and on track with regard to time
- Opened room for discussion, questions, comments, etc.
- Encouraged speaks to use microphones
- Had a structured schedule with different topics to keep things interesting
- Made the conversations fluid and engaging
- Leaned mostly on the board to participate and provide responses – this was helpful – with all the new staff it might take time for newer staff (and older) to comment on high-level often policy-type issues
- Had engaging activities like writing on the paper



*Additional notes located on the back of an evaluation form:*

- *Step 1 – tunnel*
- *Step 2 – huge solar plant near the coast*
- *Step 3 - diesel on the coast powered by solar*
- *Step 4 – pump to NACI and coastal towns*
- *Step 5 – use power recovery unit arrays every 42'*
- *Step 6 – send water to Salinas River as this will solve saltwater intrusion and create water for domestic use also while providing water to farms*

## **Planning Committee Comments on the Strategic Planning Workshop/Report**

The Planning Committee was pleased overall with the workshop. The Committee felt it would have been valuable to have a little more time to reflect on the workshop before filling out the evaluation survey. These comments are from the Committee after one month's reflection on the workshop.

### ***Question:***

At the meeting, the staff presented seven new 2-year goals. How do these goals relate to the General Manager Goals and the 5-year Strategic Plan Goals? Can the Agency provide a structure for how these goals complement each other or fit together? We feel there might be confusion with having three sets of goals tied to the Agency without some kind of crosswalk between them.

### ***Two-year Goal Exercise:***

Upon reflection, the Committee felt that the exercise prioritizing the 2-year goals was a good exercise but producing indicators of success on the spot for seven goals required more thought (i.e., being able to articulate what success looks like two years from now for each goal.) In the future it would be nice to have the new goals presented in advance in the pre-workshop packet with a description of the exercise and examples of indicators of success. We should also try to include the staff and stakeholders in this exercise, possibly in breakout groups.

We also talked about using the Ag Commissioners Office or Schilling Place for the next Strategic Planning meeting for a more central location, better acoustics, and better computer presentation facilities.