Water Resources Advisory Committee

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July 15, 2010

Honorable Frank Mecham
Chairperson, Board of Supervisors
County of San Luis Obispo
976 Osos Street
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408-2040

Subject: Water Resources Advisory Committee Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report of the Shandon Community Plan

Dear Chairperson Mecham:

On April 7, 2010, the Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC) formed an ad hoc subcommittee to review the water-related sections of the Public Review Draft of the Shandon Community Plan and associated Environmental Impact Report. On May 5, 2010, the WRAC submitted comments on the Public Review Draft of the Shandon Community Plan to you for consideration. On June 2, 2010, the WRAC reviewed the ad hoc subcommittee's comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report of the Shandon Community Plan, made minor changes, and voted with only two No votes to submit the attached comments to you for further consideration.

Ad hoc subcommittee members included Ray Allen (Agriculture At-Large), Della Barrett (District 5), Sue Luft (Environmental At-Large), Steve Sinton (District 1), and Michael Winn (District 4). Member Sinton served as subcommittee chair.

Respectfully,

Michael Winn

MICHAEL WINN
Chairperson, Water Resources Advisory Committee

cc: SLO County Board of Supervisors
SLO County Planning Commission
Jay Johnson, County Department of Planning and Building

Attachment: WRAC Recommendations for the Draft Environmental Impact Report of the Shandon Community Plan

Purpose of the Committee:
To advise the County Board of Supervisors concerning all policy decisions relating to the water resources of the SLO County Flood Control & Water Conservation District. To recommend to the Board specific water resource programs. To recommend methods of financing water resource programs.

Excerpts from WRAC By-Laws dated 3/6/07

Report
of the
San Luis Obispo County Water Resources Advisory Committee
Subcommittee to review the Shandon Community Plan Update and San Juan Village Environmental Impact Report
May 2010

The subcommittee members are Steve Sinton (subcommittee chair), Ray Allen, Della Barrett, Sue Luft, Mike Winn, and Eric Greening. The subcommittee presented a report regarding our review of the Shandon Community Plan Update to the WRAC at the May 5, 2010 meeting. This report was unanimously approved by the WRAC for transmittal to SLO County Planning.

Subsequent to presentation of our report to the WRAC, the Environmental Impact Report for the Shandon Community Plan Update and San Juan Village was released. The subcommittee has prepared an additional report for consideration by the WRAC. If approved by the WRAC, this report would also be submitted to SLO County Planning.

Our review was limited to Section 4.14 - Water and Wastewater, Appendix I – Water Resources Evaluation, Section 4.2 – Agricultural Resources (with respect to agricultural water supplies) and the introductory sections which address water and wastewater. We also incorporate by reference, as additional comments, our earlier report concerning the Shandon Community Plan Update.

Section 4.14.1a. Discussion of the most recent groundwater reports and data should be included and analyzed. The section needs to address the "Paso Robles Groundwater Basin Water Balance Review and Update", dated March 2010. This report states that "demand in both the Atascadero Subbasin and the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin as a whole is approaching the average annual perennial yield." In 2009, total groundwater outflow in the Basin was between 94% and 99% of the perennial yield.

Also, the report presented to the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin Management Plan Advisory Committee should be discussed. The map of the "Change in Groundwater Levels in the Shandon Subarea for the 1997 to 2009 Period" (page 9 of the Paso Robles Groundwater Management Plan, Overview of Shandon Subarea, dated February 25, 2010) shows a 60 to 70 foot decline in groundwater elevation during the 12-year period studied, and the same report at page 7 states that a well "just west of Shandon" has experienced a decline of almost 90 feet.

The EIR appears to say that declines in the Shandon area are a result of activity in the Shandon area, not the Estrella area. However their wording is very confusing. We suggest the wording be clarified. The EIR also does not address whether the area near the Paso Robles airport with significantly lowered water levels will cause any acceleration in draw down of the Shandon area water levels. If so, the impact of that in combination with development impacts should be addressed.

In the section of the EIR where the Shandon Subbasin is described as being 2,000 feet thick in places, we suggest the EIR should include some analysis of the water quality at that depth. If no analysis is available, we suggest language be inserted pointing out that

fact, mentioning that water quality typically deteriorates deeper in an aquifer, and also mention the mild problems with mineral levels at the current level of pumping.

Section 4.14.2. Impact W-1, Water Supply. Community Plan Update. The subcommittee agrees that the impacts of both Scenario 2 and 4 are Class I, significant and unavoidable. The conclusion for Scenario 4 appears to be in conflict with the discussion in Appendix I. However, the conclusion regarding this scenario presented in Section 4.14.2 is correct.

Section 4.2. We agree that the Shandon Community Plan will violate Ag Policy 11, which states that groundwater should be maintained for production agriculture, not municipal uses.

An overarching concern of the subcommittee is that the EIR has demonstrated that there is a Class I significant and unavoidable impact to water supply from the Shandon Community Plan. The Executive Summary states that "[a]lthough implementation of the mitigation measures outlined above, including importation of State Water Project water, would reduce impacts to the extent possible, no feasible measures are available to reduce buildout water demand to the extent that there is no annual net decrease in water storage."

The subcommittee re-affirms the statements made in the WRAC comments on the Shandon Community Plan: 1) that the Plan does not reflect prudent water planning, and contradicts current basin management efforts and established land use policies and 2) it is for these reasons that the WRAC strongly objects to the proposed plan.

Further, we believe that no "Statement of Overriding Considerations" could genuinely override this resource limitation. The current voluntary basin-wide efforts to conserve our existing groundwater supply are pointless if the County will allow overdrafting of the groundwater in Shandon. In fact, approval of the Shandon plan with its reliance on groundwater could de-rail the progress made thus far in voluntary conservation when individuals see their own curtailing of water use was only to provide water for new development.

While the EIR concludes that the Falling Star development will not adversely impact groundwater supplies underlying Shandon, it is unclear if this assessment includes all of the potential development from existing undeveloped parcels in the community. The number of infill and pre-existing lots within the Shandon planning area should be included in evaluating this potential development impact.

At page 22 of section 4.14 in setting the "Plan Requirements and Timing" for the wastewater treatment facility, the EIR would require the design of the facility prior to the issuance of building permits for development, but not the actual commitment to construction of the WWTF as was recommended by the WRAC in the prior and included comments on the community plan update.