

What's up with the WSAC?

Greg Pepping, Santa Cruz Water Supply Advisory Committee

In 2013 the City of Santa Cruz shelved its plans to build a desal plant with Soquel Creek Water District. With that course change, we were left with the fundamental question: what are we going to do to ensure a reliable, safe, and adequate water supply for our community? To some, we don't need to do anything. To others, we can conserve our way out of the "problem." And others believe we should construct a desal plant, build more dams, and more. That's the nature of a community: we have a variety of opinions.

That said, we all want a bright future for Santa Cruz. The challenge now is to forge some level of agreement on what that means and how to get there.

In February of 2014, the Santa Cruz City Council created a 14-member Water Supply Advisory Committee (WSAC). The WSAC charter states that its purpose is to "explore, through an iterative, fact-based process, the City's water profile, including supply, demand and future risks; analyze potential solutions to deliver a safe, adequate, reliable and environmentally sustainable water supply; and develop strategy recommendations for City Council consideration."

The WSAC members represent a wide range of backgrounds and interests - engineers and environmentalists, mothers and fathers, lifetime residents and more-recent arrivals. While each of us approaches this work from a different angle, we are united in one respect: we seek real solutions, and we highly value transparency in this process.

Early on the WSAC decided to divide our work into two phases. Phase 1, "Recon" (for reconnaissance), focused on establishing trust within the committee, learning more about the City's water system, identifying a wide-ranging set of possible solutions, and developing the tools and processes we will use to evaluate those solutions and develop final recommendations. We've just completed Phase 1, and our 164-page summary report is available at www.santacruzwatersupply.com.

What's next for the WSAC? Phase 2, which some call the Decision Phase, or the "Real Deal." In Phase 2 we will evaluate all of the solutions before us and offer a recommendation to City Council that addresses Santa Cruz's water needs for many years to come. That set of *possible* solutions we'll be considering is comprehensive, and includes supply (such as desal and other alternatives), storage (such as lining an empty quarry to serve as a new reservoir) and enhanced conservation. A number of content experts are also serving the WSAC as technical advisors. Most likely, our recommendation will be a portfolio of multiple alternatives, addressing the inherent uncertainties that relate to our water future.

The website above, along with <https://civonomics.com/santacruzwater>, allows you to learn more about Santa Cruz's many water options.

This is the first in a series of essays from WSAC members. Over the next several months, future essays will describe our ongoing work and the progress we are making. Our goal is to help ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of the work we are doing. We genuinely want input from and engagement

with the community as we work to resolve this long-standing issue. Please contribute as you feel compelled, and know that you have the opportunity, and even duty, to do so.

The WSAC charter directs us to come back to City Council with our recommendations, and as elected officials they will set the direction for what we do as a community to address our water future. Originally WSAC was to serve for twelve months, but we're expecting to take a bit longer; we will offer our final recommendations by October of this year.

I believe I speak for all WSAC members when I say we look forward to continuing this work with the entire community. Together we will develop a consensus on recommendations that secure our water future and that we can all support.