



Sonoma County Special Districts Association

Chapter Meeting Minutes Thursday, April 6, 2023 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.

Call to Order/Roll Call

President, Ramona Faith, called the meeting to order at 2:04 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

Members Present: Colleen Haley, Jennifer Bechtold, Ramona Faith, Cheryl Doran-Girard, Rich Holmer, Adriane Garayalde, Sukey Robb-Wilder, Aaron Fairbrook, Jeff Veliquette, Gary Helfrich

Business Affiliates Present: Regan Ballo, Five Star Bank

Minutes prepared by: Jennifer Bechtold

I. Open Forum/Public Comment – Ramona Faith, President

Adriane Garayalde is working with Alexander Valley to create a new water district. They have created a new program to do water sharing during the drought, the first of its kind in the state.

II. Approval of Minutes

A. September 22, 2022

Motion moved by Cheryl Doran-Girard and seconded by Sukey Robb-Wilder.

Motion Carried: Aye 8 No 0 Abstain 0

III. Introduction of Guest Speaker, David Rabbitt, Sonoma County Board of Supervisors – Ramona Faith, President

Jennifer Bechtold introduced Supervisor David Rabbitt, who thanked the districts for all their hard work. Supervisor Rabbitt is a senior members of the Board of Supervisors who is entering his 4th term.

Supervisor Rabbitt discussed the following items currently happening at the Board of Supervisors office:

1. Recent fire service consolidations have decreased from 48 to around 20 over the last few years.
2. Golden Gate Bridge Authority, of which Supervisor Rabbitt serves as a finance committee member. Ridership took a huge decline during the pandemic and impacted the tolls, which makes up 50% of their budget.
3. Supervisors are working on a well ordinance and reacting to a lawsuit to deal with public doctrine and still permit wells.
4. Supervisors are also working to create a camping ordinance to help work with the Joe Rodota Trail and homeless in Sonoma County. You must have a place for people to go before you can clear properties. The County has spent millions of dollars to clear these encampments over the past few years, and those funds would be better spent on supportive housing and wraparound services.
5. The County is currently working on labor negotiations with its staff.
6. The pandemic brought more one-time money to the County than ever before, but we need ongoing funds to really help programs.

Gary Helfrich expressed his frustration over the lack of communication around the Gold Ridge Fire consolidation. The fire district has been asked to show up to a public meeting multiple times and has not done so. Camp Meeker is the landowner of the firehouse and with the lack of transparency about what is going on, there may be a large protest from the community. Supervisor Rabbitt has asked for cooperation with the consolidations and feels transparency and communication are important parts of the process. He will reach out to Gold Ridge for more information. Rich Holmer commented that this process is not yet complete. A notice of consolidation will be sent out to every property owner with a chance for a protest period. Rich also referred to the LAFCO website where there is a wealth of information if there are questions from community. Gary wants this consolidation to succeed but the community may see this as something forced on them by County. If a landowner is suddenly going to be taxed, and they were anticipating this, it will be a bigger issue. If the service will be better than status quo, then community members are more likely to support it.

Jennifer Bechtold asked about the pandemic funds the County received and why special districts were not included in the distributions. Supervisor Rabbitt said that

Guest Speak: Supervisor David Rabbitt Continued:

\$40 million in ARPA funds were received and the County had to figure out a fair and equitable way to distribute this money. He is not sure why special districts did not receive funds. The CARES Act was another area that funds were available and direct payments were made to businesses. Colleen Haley said that neither ARPA nor CARES funds were available for special districts, but through the CSDA, some funding was received. Ramon concurred that health care districts were still caring for patients but not able to get money in return.

Rich commented he would like to see communication between the County and special districts improve. As an example, when the County is contemplating grants, have the water districts involved early on, so it gives them the opportunity to seek funds. Rich feels there should be collaboration between special districts and the County on grants, and this makes more sense to funding sources to have a more unified approach. Supervisor Rabbitt said he agrees and appreciates a collaborative approach going forward. He said there are thought of contingency funds for various projects within the County including roads and water districts. Sukey Robb-Wilder said collaboration has been better since Johannes came in, and seconded what Rich said. She said the County needs to take into consideration that our water districts are not part of the Sonoma County Water Agency.

Ramona expressed her concerns for the youth in our country. She said SCOE is very active in conversations on school and student safety, and wondered if the County is making this a topic of conversation. Ramona said this is a multi-faceted issue and communities need to figure out what they are going to do to address student safety. Supervisor Rabbitt feels the worst impact of COVID was to all kids, in terms of taking care of youth and student safety. Measure O, which passed in Sonoma County is being used in schools for wraparound services. The new program includes having wellness centers in schools and support systems available. We have long been short-changed in mental health in this county. Ramona feels we need to come up with a five-year plan or ten-year plan instead of a one-year plan on how to better serve our youth.

Cheryl said one of her observations of consolidations of fire districts, is whether volunteer programs are going to fall away. Supervisor Rabbitt commented that he thinks reducing volunteer opportunities might not give communities what they need either. Volunteer firefighting is a great pathway forward to a career as a professional firefighter and a great service to the County. Fire Chief Jeff Veliquette said he agrees with Cheryl about mentorship opportunities and volunteer programs are where many start their careers and learn what the job is. He has followed the Gold Ridge consolidation closely at LAFCO, and assured Cheryl the model presented does not take away any of the volunteer programs, but proposes to continue and enhance those

Guest Speak: Supervisor David Rabbitt Continued:

programs. Many agencies are having trouble attracting volunteers but, in this area, volunteerism is alive and well.

IV. Special District Spotlight – Featuring Petaluma Health Care District

Item will be deferred until the next Chapter meeting. Ramona said the health care district is moving their Blue Zone project forward and at the next meeting she will talk more about the Petaluma Valley Hospital maternity ward being closed early by Providence.

V. CSDA Update: CSDA Senior Public Affairs Field Coordinator, Colleen Haley

Colleen mentioned legislative days will be held May 16-17. The Chapter president will receive free registration and dinner, and if she cannot make the event, we can nominate someone else to attend.

The CSDA is focusing on two legislative items. The first is Initiative 21-0042A1 which limits the ability of counties and special districts to raise revenues for government services. The CSDA is encouraging all special districts to please submit a resolution to your Board, opposing this initiative.

The second legislation is AB557 (Hart) which gives districts the ability to have remote meetings under Governors actions. To learn more, go to CSDA website: [csda.net/advocate/take-action/voter limitations](http://csda.net/advocate/take-action/voter%20limitations). There is also legislation to force all vehicles to go to all electric by 2027. The CSDA is asking for letters to go to CARB opposing this.

VI. Overview and Update on Membership Process - Jennifer Bechtold, Secretary

Jennifer encouraged all CSDA members to also become members of the Sonoma County Chapter so they can have voting rights. To become a Chapter member, please submit three items; a membership application, resolution adopted by your Board of Directors and a certificate of liability. All these documents can be found on our website, scsda.specialdistrict.org. Once completed, return forms back to Jennifer at jbechtold@rafd.org.

VII. Good of the Order

The next SCSDA Chapter meeting will be held virtually on July 27. On the next agenda we will be advertising open positions for the executive committee and at-large members.

VIII. Adjournment

The SCSDA meeting was adjourned at 3:32 p.m.