



Sonoma County Special Districts Association

Membership Meeting Minutes Thursday, October 26, 2023 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.

This meeting was held virtually

Call to Order/Roll Call

Roll Call: Ramona Faith, Jennifer Bechtold, Anneke Turbeville, Tamara Chapman-Davis, Jeff Veliquette, Sage Howell, Reagan Ballo, Colleen Haley, Max Wilmarth, Jennifer Butler, Brittany Jensen, Chad Davisson

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

No public comment.

II. Introduction of Guest Speaker, Sonoma County Supervisor, Susan Gorin – Ramona Faith, President

Ramona introduced Supervisor Susan Gorin, noting she serves the communities of Kenwood, Glen Ellen, Sonoma and Santa Rosa. This is her third and final term as a Board of Supervisors and she plans to retire in 2024.

Supervisor Gorin mentioned that she serves on LAFCO as well. A large percentage of the area she serves live in unincorporated areas and about 60% of her district is in corporate areas of Santa Rosa. One item that will affect our fire districts as we move forward is a new sales tax measure that will hit the ballot in spring of 2024.

Supervisor Gorin noted that the County has seen five major wildfires in the past six years, so one of the big pushes has been to increase fire inspections. She believes everyone should go through the inspection of their home to find out how to make their home more fire resistant. Supervisor Gorin is also an advocate for the County chipping program. She mentioned homeowners can also reduce insurance costs by hardening their homes.

Sonoma Valley has suffered through two large fires, and after getting through their grief, debris cleanup and rebuilding, they are now doing many successful prescribed

Guest Speaker, Supervisor Gorin Continued:

burns. There has been pushback from grape growers who are telling Cal Fire they can't do prescribed burns during harvest and the growing season, so they need to find a way around this. Additionally, two housing developments were just approved in Sonoma Valley. One is near the Hanna Center and one on the former SDC property. Both developments are in high fire severity zones, so there are concerns about evacuations. Discussions are ongoing.

PG&E settlement funds have funded three years of vegetation management in the County. Permit Sonoma received a large grant for around \$38 million for home hardening. The BOS is also looking for other funding mechanisms and grants as keeping homes safe is a huge challenge for homeowners to fund.

The County of Sonoma is collaborating with Napa Valley Supervisors on ways to create fuel breaks and reduce the fire danger. Many of the wind events causing disasters is coming from the Mayacamas mountains.

Jennifer Bechtold asked Supervisor Gorin if the County has ever considered funding fire abatement programs for seniors as we receive a lot of calls about this being a hardship to our senior population. Supervisor Gorin replied the County must be careful about giving help to seniors and said it would be nice to have non-profits that can come in and fulfill those needs. She has no answer but will keep this in mind.

Ramona asked if Measure O has had any impact on the mental health crisis in our County. Supervisor Gorin said there was some help for crisis counseling following the fires, but there are many more issues now caused by the pandemic. ARPA funds helped with a lot of mental health services in County as well, but Measure O is just a drop in the bucket to what is really needed funding wise. Ramona said crisis response teams and SAFE Team are doing well, but if we can put in a County-wide program that would create one system instead of two, this also might make a difference.

Jennifer Butler asked Supervisor Gorin about the housing subdivision being planned in Graton and how many dwellings will be built. Supervisor Gorin said no plans have been submitted for those projects to date. Jennifer asked how long the process takes to certify the proposal of households. A new Senate Bill is being introduced that would shorten the time for review by the community, and this is very concerning to residents.

III. Approval of Minutes (Only Member Agencies Can Vote)

A. July 27, 2023

Motion to accept the minutes of July 27, 2023 made by Tamara Chapman-Davis and seconded by Anneke Turbeville.

IV. Special District Spotlight – Wildfire Mitigation Efforts – Northern Sonoma County Fire District

Anneke Turbeville from the Northern Sonoma County Fire District noted that there are multiple agencies working on fire mitigation efforts within the County. Additional grants to keep these efforts going are being sought by Fire Safe Sonoma, Sonoma Resource Conservation District, Sonoma County Regional Parks and other fire agencies.

Anneke said there are a lot of roadside clearances as well as defensible space inspections being completed at no charge. Fire department staff will go out and talk to residents about their property, clearances and how to keep home safe from fires. We rely heavily on COPE to get the message out.

Ramona asked what challenges we are facing and what they are most proud of. Anneke said most of the efforts are grant-funded so everything must be tracked very carefully. There is now more accountability. Residents see abatement work being completed and then request those same services at their property. Unfortunately, they do not understand that this is all community planned as part of the grant. Northern Sonoma County Fire District is most proud of the fact they started as just a fuels crew and are still in service four years later.

Chief Veliquette mentioned that Northern Sonoma County has a first level vegetation management program. Many of the fire districts have an agreement with Sonoma County to perform defensible space fire inspections in unincorporated areas. Rancho Adobe completed about 400 inspections this year that were funded by the County. It's a great program and there probably are a few thousand inspections being completed county-wide, on a conservative level. When we get a call or question from a resident regarding defensible space or home hardening, we try and send someone out immediately to answer any questions. The work recommended can get expensive very quickly, so we try and prioritize and phase in the work. Chief Veliquette also commented that the County is doing a great job of funding agencies for vegetation management, including controlled burns and removal of ladder fuels.

V. New Business

A. Discussion on Regional Chapter Formation with Napa County

Last meeting, we briefly discussed merging with Napa County Special Districts. Tamara feels that joining efforts would be good as our Counties do interface. Colleen mentioned she assists with running six other chapters, so she will start these conversations in January with Napa. She also suggested having some joint meetings without the pressure of consolidation. Chad said he is the President of Contra Costa County Chapter and is on Board for CSDA and feels there is a

New Business Continued:

benefit to joint meetings, because there are a lot of common shared issues. There currently are only a handful of special districts in Napa County. Ramona commented that we struggle running the Chapter and so we welcome the joint meetings.

Brittany mentioned that a lot of special districts were not receiving relief funding during COVID. One of their initial needs was working together as special districts and speaking as one voice, which may have helped this issue along.

Colleen will reach out to the Napa special districts and see how we can work together. She will also invite them to our next meeting in January. Ramona will send an invitation to them as well, prior to Colleen meeting with them in person.

B. Discussion on Top Challenges for Special Districts and How to Find Help

Ramona feels we should prepare for our January meeting. The focus should be on meeting with Napa and working together and valuing what special districts bring to Sonoma County. Chad feels it's important for Colleen to provide what the Chapter and CSDA is all about.

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

Colleen will have a lobbyist report at the end of the year she will share showing all bills that have been voted into law. ACA 13 will be on the November 2024 ballot (was previously slated for the June 2024 ballot), which will be at the same time as the CBRT Initiative. CSDA has been told by attorneys that if ACA 13 passes, CBRT cannot go into effect.

SDLA conference will be held November 2024 in Marin County. The Board Clerk conference is in Monterey in November.

VII. Good of the Order/Future Agenda Topics

- Next meeting is January 25
- Five Star Bank Raffle!

VIII. Adjournment

The Sonoma County Special Districts meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.