



COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA
LONG RANGE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING
COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING DIVISION

30 E. Figueroa St., 2nd Floor
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

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October 20, 2005

Mr. Kevin D. Walsh, General Manager and Chief Engineer
Goleta Water District
4699 Hollister Ave
Santa Barbara CA 93110

RE: Potential increases in agricultural meter charges and water rates

Dear Mr. Walsh:

Recent news reports indicate that your district is considering potentially substantial increases in meter and use rates for agricultural water users. This matter is of concern to Santa Barbara County because of the adverse effect that such increases could have on commercial agriculture, which is of great economic and social importance locally and throughout the county.

It also is possible that increases in agricultural water rates could lead some farmers and ranchers to drill or re-activate wells and produce their own groundwater for crops and livestock. This would further complicate the task of sound regional management of groundwater resources, which could be contrary to the interests of all of your customers and other interested parties.

The attachment to this letter includes relevant policies and other standards from the county's adopted Comprehensive Plan and state-certified Local Coastal Program. Please consider these in your actions on any changes to agricultural water rates.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Greg Mohr at 568-2080 or greg@co.santa-barbara.ca.us.

Sincerely,

John McInnes, Director, Long Range and Strategic Planning
Santa Barbara County Executive Office

Attachment

cc: Supervisors Salud Carbajal, Susan Rose, and Brooks Firestone
Ron Cortez, Deputy County Executive Officer
Terri Maus-Nisich, Assistant County Executive Officer
Lisa Plowman, Deputy Director, Comprehensive Planning
Greg Mohr, Planner III, Comprehensive Planning

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GOLETA WATER DISTRICT

Michael Brown,
County Executive Officer

Terri Maus-Nisich,
Assistant County Executive Officer

John McInnes,
Director, Long Range and
Strategic Planning

Lisa Plowman,
Deputy Director,
Comprehensive Planning

Adopted Santa Barbara County Policies and Standards Favoring the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture, Goleta Area

Comprehensive Plan, Land Use Element

Regional (countywide) goal for "Agriculture: In the rural areas, cultivated agriculture shall be preserved and, where conditions allow, expansion and intensification should be supported. Lands with both prime and non-prime soils shall be reserved for agricultural uses."

Local Coastal Program, Coastal Land Use Plan

Coastal Act Policy 30241: The maximum amount of prime agricultural land shall be maintained in agricultural production to assure the protection of the areas' agricultural economy, and conflicts shall be minimized between agricultural and urban land uses through all of the following:

...

- (e) By assuring that public service and facility expansions and non-agricultural development do not impair agricultural viability, either through increased assessment costs or degraded air and water quality.

Coastal Plan Policy 8-1: An agricultural land use designation shall be given to any parcel in rural areas that meets one or more of the following criteria:

- (a) Prime agricultural soils (Capability Classes I and II as determined by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service).
- (b) Other prime agricultural lands as defined in Section 51201 of the Public Resources Code (Appendix A).
- (c) Lands in existing agricultural use.
- (d) Lands with agricultural potential (e.g., soil, topography, and location that will support long term agricultural use).

These criteria shall also be used for designating agricultural land use in urban areas, except where agricultural viability is already severely impaired by conflicts with urban uses.

Coastal Plan Policy 8-2: If a parcel is designated for agricultural use and is located in a rural area not contiguous with the urban/rural boundary, conversion to non-agricultural use shall not be permitted unless such conversion of the entire parcel would allow for another priority use under the coastal Act, e.g., coastal dependent industry, recreation and access, or protection of an environmentally sensitive habitat. Such conversion shall not be in conflict with contiguous agricultural operations in the area, and shall be consistent with Section 30241 and 30242 of the Coastal Act.

Coastal Plan Policy 8-3: If a parcel is designated for agricultural use and is located in a rural area contiguous with the urban/rural boundary, conversion shall not be permitted unless:

- (a) The agricultural use of the land is severely impaired because of physical factors (e.g., high water table), topographical constraints, or urban conflicts (e.g., surrounded by urban uses which inhibit production or make it impossible to qualify for agricultural preserve status), and
- (b) Conversion would contribute to the logical completion of an existing urban neighborhood, and
- (c) There are no alternative areas appropriate for infilling within the urban area or there are no other parcels along the urban periphery where the agricultural potential is more severely restricted.

Coastal Plan Policy 8-4: As a requirement for approval of any proposed land division of agricultural land designated as Agriculture I or II in the land use plan, the County shall make the finding that the long-term agricultural productivity of the property will not be diminished by the proposed division.

Comprehensive Plan, Agricultural Element

GOAL I. Santa Barbara County shall assure and enhance the continuation of agriculture as a major viable production industry in Santa Barbara County. Agriculture shall be encouraged. Where conditions allow, (taking into account environmental impacts) expansion and intensification shall be supported.

Policy I.F. The quality and availability of water, air, and soil resources shall be protected through provisions including but not limited to, the stability of Urban/Rural Boundary Lines, maintenance of buffer areas around agricultural areas, and the promotion of conservation practices.

GOAL II. Agricultural lands shall be protected from adverse urban influence.

Policy II.D. Conversion of highly productive agricultural lands whether urban or rural, shall be discouraged. The County shall support programs which encourage the retention of highly productive agricultural lands.

Comprehensive Plan, Conservation Element, Groundwater Resources Section

Findings supporting goal & policy statements:

- The County recognizes that the various water purveyors are responsible for providing adequate service to their customers, consistent with their statutory and contractual mandates. At the same time, within the unincorporated areas, the County has the responsibility to ensure that land use and development can be supported in the long-term by adequate services and resources; this responsibility is implemented through overall land use planning efforts as well as case-by-case development permit actions.”
- The County recognizes the preferential value of voluntary cooperative and collaborative efforts, rather than regulatory actions, in achieving the Goals of this document. Such efforts, in order to be effective, should involve and must consider all stakeholders (property owners, public & private groundwater purveyors & users, and other public agencies & private entities with affected interests or relevant expertise). The County intends to act, within its powers and financial abilities, to encourage and assist voluntary cooperative and collaborative efforts which promote the Goals of this document.

GOAL 1. To ensure adequate quality and quantity of groundwater for present and future County residents, and to eliminate prolonged overdraft¹ of any groundwater basins.

GOAL 3. To coordinate County land use planning decisions and water resources planning and supply availability.

PRINCIPLE 3B - The County recognizes the water purveyors' responsibilities and obligations to supply the customers within their respective service areas.

POLICY 3.4: The County's land use planning decisions shall be consistent with the ability of any affected water purveyor(s) to provide adequate services and resources to their existing customers, in coordination with any applicable groundwater management plan.

ACTION 3.4.1: The County, in its planning activities, shall work cooperatively with local water purveyors, the County Water Agency, the County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, State and Federal agencies concerned with water resources, and private groups and individuals with particular interest and expertise related to water resources.

ACTION 3.4.2: Santa Barbara County shall develop its land use plans and policies in a manner which takes into account all groundwater uses (e.g., domestic, agricultural, natural resources and habitats, etc.).

ACTION 3.4.4: Santa Barbara County shall encourage and assist local water purveyors in developing adequate water supplies (groundwater, surface water, desalination, etc.) to serve their customers and communities consistent with the applicable general plan(s).

ACTION 3.4.5: The County shall facilitate the efforts of purveyors to serve overlying landowners from the purveyor's system.

Comprehensive Plan & Local Coastal Program, Goleta Community Plan

Policy LUA-GV-1: Land designated for agriculture within the urban boundary shall be preserved for agricultural use, unless the County makes findings that the land is no longer appropriate for agriculture or there is an overriding public need for conversion to other uses for which there is no other land available in the Goleta urban area.

¹ The term "prolonged overdraft" as used in this Element means net extractions in excess of a basin's perennial yield as averaged over a period of ten or more years. It is recognized that groundwater basin management may involve temporary, planned drawdowns of groundwater levels (i.e., pumpage in excess of a basin's perennial yield over one or more years) as part of a conjunctive use or other basin management program, and that these temporary, planned drawdowns of groundwater levels may result in a temporary degradation of groundwater quality. The primary intent is to maintain groundwater use and replenishment in a long-term balance; to avoid to the maximum feasible extent all significant adverse effects, both long-term and permanent, on the County's groundwater resources; and to maintain or improve groundwater quality on a long-term basis.