

Action Summary Minutes

San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District

GOVERNING BOARD STUDY SESSION

November 29-30, 2023

**Meeting held at:
Double Tree Hotel Ballroom
1150 Ninth Street, Modesto, CA 95354**

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER – The Chair, Supervisor Vito Chiesa, called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.
2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
3. ROLL CALL – was taken and a quorum was present.

Present:

Vito Chiesa, Supervisor, Chair	Stanislaus County
Deborah Lewis, Councilmember, Vice Chair	City of Los Banos
Drew Bessinger, Councilmember	City of Clovis
David Couch, Supervisor	Kern County
Rosa Escutia-Braaton, Councilmember	City of Modesto
Robert Macaulay, Supervisor	Madera County
Buddy Mendes, Supervisor	Fresno County
Tania Pacheco-Werner, PhD	Appointed by Governor
Lloyd Pareira, Supervisor	Merced County
Alvaro Preciado, Mayor	City of Avenal
Gilberto Reyna, Councilmember	City of Wasco
Robert Rickman, Supervisor	San Joaquin County
Rusty Robinson, Supervisor	Kings County
Alexander Sherriffs, M.D.	Appointed by Governor
Amy Shuklian, Supervisor	Tulare County

Absent:

Supervisor Macaulay

4. HOUSEKEEPING AND LOGISTICS
5. WELCOMING REMARKS – Chair Vito Chiesa and Councilmember Rosa Escutia-Braaton welcomed all attendees to Modesto.

6. UPDATES FROM CALIFORNIA AIR RESOURCES BOARD AND FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY – Martha Guzman, Regional Administrator for EPA Region 9, presented an update on recent EPA efforts. Ms. Guzman also recognized the innovation with reducing emissions from nut harvesting and the way the District incorporates incentives along with meeting goals on the regulatory side. Liane Randolph, Chair for California Air Resources Board, presented an update on recent actions and strategies of CARB including the regulations to decarbonize the transportation sector, an update to the climate change scoping plan and the approval of the Blueprint 2.0, the statewide strategy to update the 617 program.

Councilmember Bessinger shared his concerns of regarding the high cost to convert electric vehicles and state of the infrastructure necessary to support the transition called for under state regulations. Ms. Randolph responded that vehicles do not have to be electric, as the requirement is zero emission which can also be hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

Dr. Sherriffs commented that there are communities and entities, such as Fowler Unified School District, that have transitioned to solar power and electric buses. He expressed the need for more communities to make similar transitions.

Dr. Pacheco-Werner inquired about potential federal funding to support investigation and research into areas such as ammonia which Ms. Guzman highlighted as an area EPA would like to further explore in the context of upcoming plans. Significant additional work is necessary to ensure the scientific understanding of these complex areas is present to be able to work collaboratively with industry and really answer these questions in a way that is sound. Ms. Guzman responded that while the funding currently available is competitively based, the District would compete extremely well. While the funding may not be sufficient to institutionalize the capacity necessary to meet the need, it could certainly help to build toward that goal.

Councilmember Lewis shared her concerns on making the transition to cleaner energy and electric vehicles more accessible for communities. She also addressed the 617 program and the goal to make entire regions compliant with environmental standards. Ms. Lewis also expressed concern about the readiness of the power grids and demand for electric and solar energy in upgrading the grids to make the transition to cleaner energy more viable. Ms. Randolph shared the inclusivity in the 617 program and Blueprint 2.0, and that the Community Air grant program is open to organizations in various disadvantaged areas. She explained that the goal is to extend solutions to all communities. Ms. Randolph addressed the concern for infrastructure by sharing the state's focus on dependability and a reliable grid with backup assets for peak energy demand and extreme weather conditions.

Mayor Preciado thanked both Ms. Guzman and Ms. Randolph for participating in the Study Session. Mr. Preciado asked if there are conversations happening with

regulatory agencies to assist with self-sufficiency. He also expressed the need for hydrogen fuel infrastructure. Ms. Randolph responded that California has received federal funding to establish hydrogen hubs and increase the production and use of hydrogen in the state.

Samir Sheikh, Executive Director/APCO, spoke on the need for more scientific research, and noted that the San Joaquin Valley is one of the most extensively studied air basins in the world. Mr. Sheikh also highlighted the ongoing research facilitated by a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) called the Study Agency (created collaboratively with EPA and CARB) that is providing an efficient tool for administering research funding and providing a streamlined approach for ongoing research partnerships. Mr. Sheikh also shared the need for support and ongoing conversations along with community engagement.

Public Comment:

- Kevin Hamilton, Central California Asthma Collaborative
- Manuel Cunha, Nisei Farmers League (NFL)
- John Sanders, Resident

This item was taken out of order

8. DISCUSS CLIMATE INITIATIVES AND POTENTIAL CO-BENEFICIAL OPPORTUNITIES – Tom Jordan, Senior Policy Advisor, presented an update on current climate initiatives, and discussed potential opportunities to reduce both greenhouse gases and criteria air pollutants. Mr. Jordan also welcomed the following individuals who participated in the discussion of this item:

- Steven S. Cliff, Ph.D., CARB, Executive Director
- Ben Machol, P.E., U.S. EPA, Region 9
- Carlos Suarez, USDA-NRCS State Conservationist

Dr. Pacheco-Werner asked about opportunities and what is needed for funding to assist with composting facilities. Mr. Suarez explained that the funding is available for individuals or farmers, and that applicants can go into an office and request funding and staff will be assigned to evaluate the need and see if the applicants qualify.

Mr. Rickman inquired about the increased weight of the electric heavy-duty trucks and the concern for safety and roadway maintenance. Dr. Cliff responded that there are some exemptions on weight allowing up to 82,000 pounds if they are near-zero or zero emission trucks. Dr. Cliff also stated that there is an issue with the technology transition needed to help reduce weight of the batteries so that the ability to carry payload won't be impacted. Dr. Cliff shared that with rapid safety advancements in vehicles, he believes newer vehicles are safer than ever.

Mr. Sheikh thanked the presenters and expressed his appreciation for their great partnership and leadership in this area. Mr. Sheikh also shared that the District is

actively working with various partners to successfully bring the unprecedented climate funding to the Valley in order to benefit the region.

Public Comment:

- Kevin Abernathy, Milk Producers Council & Dairy Cares
- Jesse Rosen, Almond Board of California
- Manuel Cunha, N.F.L.

7. CONTINUED EFFORTS TO PARTNER WITH VALLEY AGRICULTURE TO REDUCE NUT HARVEST EMISSIONS – Sheraz Gill, Deputy APCO, discussed the District’s continued efforts to work closely with Valley agriculture and partner agencies to identify opportunities for further reducing localized and regional particulate matter emissions from nut harvesting through ongoing funding advocacy, research, and other efforts. Mr. Gill also welcomed the following individuals who participated in the discussion of this item:

- Roger Isom, Western Agricultural Processors Association
- Gabrielle Ludwig, Almond Board of California
- Jesse Baum, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Supervisor Couch inquired about the cost of the equipment, asked if grants at 50% funding would be enough for the farmers to take advantage of the funding, and asked if there were options of offering a higher percentage of grant funding to replace this equipment.

Ms. Ludwig stated that almond growers are losing money for the first time in over 20 years, so the 50% of funding may not be adequate to assist growers.

Mr. Isom agreed that the amounts should be increased. He stated that further evaluation is necessary to determine the appropriate funding percentage.

Mr. Sheikh, explained that there is potential for enhancements to this program and would like to work with the Ag sector to evaluate what enhancements would make the program work best for as many growers as possible.

Dr. Sherriffs shared the top priorities for the program should be to minimize dust, support small growers, focus on collaboration, and push new technology to reduce emissions.

Supervisor Mendes shared that, from his perspective as an almond grower, the incentives need to be increased from the proposed 50% in order to get more growers to be able to participate.

Supervisor Pareira suggested that the model of the program should be re-evaluated and potentially moved to an incentive for acres harvested with low-dust equipment.

Mr. Sheikh appreciated the feedback provided and believes success with this program will involve significant engagement with agricultural stakeholders. Towards that end, Mr. Sheikh said the District will engage with agricultural representatives to discuss potential program enhancements and return to the Board as necessary at a future meeting for Governing Board consideration.

Public Comment:

- Manuel Cunha, N.F.L.

9. UPDATE ON WILDFIRE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE STRATEGY – Jon Klassen, Director of Air Quality Science and Planning, and John Stagnaro, Director of Compliance, presented this item to discuss ongoing work to promote resources for reducing exposure to harmful wood smoke and enhance fuel reduction efforts. Mr. Klassen also welcomed the following individuals who participated in the discussion of this item:

- Angel Prieto, Sequoia National Forest
- Jonathan Fitch, Cal Fire
- Joe Gonzales, US Forest Service

Mr. Sheikh expressed his appreciation for the partnership with the land management agencies and their presentations today.

Dr. Sherriffs thanked the presenters and asked how prescribed fires impact carbon sequestration over the long term. Mr. Fitch responded that forests naturally store carbon, but too much fuel and lack of controlled fires can lead to large destructive wildfires and that release carbon very quickly. Prescribed fires help release carbon gradually, keeping the forest healthy.

Councilmember Lewis asked if land managers must go through CEQA to complete controlled burns. Mr. Fitch responded yes, CEQA is a part of the process for approving and conducting prescribed burns.

Public Comment: None

Moved: Mendes

Seconded: Pareira

Ayes: Bessinger, Couch, Escutia-Braaton, Lewis, Mendes, Pacheco-Werner, Pareira, Preciado, Reyna, Rickman, Robinson, Sherriffs, Shuklian, Chiesa

Nays: None

Motion unanimously carried to approve the Resolution to delegate authority to the Executive Director/APCO to approve and enter into Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) as needed to use their online portal to issue District hazard reduction burning permits in an effective, efficient,

and service-oriented manner.

The Governing Board recessed for the evening at 5:42 p.m.

The Governing Board reconvened on November 30th at 9:03 a.m.

10. FUNDING AND OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES FOR REDUCING FIREWORK AIR QUALITY IMPACTS – Jon Klassen and Todd DeYoung, Director of Grants and Incentives, presented this item to discuss options for promoting alternative practices to reduce the use of fireworks and related exposure to harmful pollution. This item also included the following individuals who participated in the discussion of this item:

- Brandon Gillespie, Chief of Police, City of Modesto
- Darin Jesberg, Deputy Fire Chief, City of Modesto

Councilmember Escutia-Braaton thanked the panel for the presentation and asked if lightshows can be customized and be accompanied by music. Mr. DeYoung responded that the light shows are customizable and usually are accompanied with music.

Ms. Escutia-Braaton also asked about the distribution logistics of the proposed grant funds and if it would be determined by population. Mr. DeYoung responded that distribution for the pilot program is proposed as first-come first-served, but the distribution is definitely open to your Board's consideration and feedback.

Supervisor Robinson expressed his appreciation for the program and the option for an alternative to fireworks. Mr. Robinson inquired if there was any pushback from community organizations that utilize fireworks sales as a fundraiser. Mr. DeYoung answered that within the communities who have implemented the light shows they have been well received.

Dr. Sherriffs thanked the panel and emphasized the importance of the positive health impacts this will have on residents.

Mayor Preciado shared his appreciation for the presentation and suggested some of the funding to go to the organizations who utilize firework sales as fundraising efforts.

Supervisor Shuklian was thankful for the presentation and sees the benefits in the alternatives for the health and safety of communities.

Supervisor Pareira suggested that with this pilot program the funds be divided geographically to ensure all the counties can take advantage of the benefits.

Councilmember Reyna appreciated the presentation and highlighted the need to engage with small communities. Mr. Reyna also suggested partnering with other agencies to curtail illegal fireworks.

Supervisor Mendes agreed with the suggestion to divide funds regionally and also shared the concern of illegal fireworks.

Mr. Sheikh spoke on the potential for engagement with health officers and legislators to address the issues brought up today. Based on the feedback received, Mr. Sheikh suggested utilizing a geographic distribution of funds for the pilot program. He is optimistic about the program's interest and looks forward to potential growth in the program.

Public Comment: None

Moved: Mendes
Seconded: Pacheco-Werner
Ayes: Bessinger, Couch, Escutia-Braaton, Lewis, Mendes, Pacheco-Werner, Pareira, Preciado, Reyna, Rickman, Robinson, Sherriffs, Shuklian, Chiesa
Nays: None

Motion unanimously carried to allocate up to \$250,000 in funding, distributed geographically throughout the Valley, for a pilot incentive program to help offset the cost of integrating drone light shows, or other approved alternatives, in large-scale public displays; and coordinate outreach with cities/counties implementing large-scale public events promoting drone light shows and alternatives to personal fireworks, including promoting residents attending community events in lieu of utilizing personal fireworks.

11. DISCUSS DISTRICT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS AND ACCEPT \$1,000,000 EPA COMMUNITY GRANT – Jessica Olsen, Director of Community Strategies & Resources, reported on the District's community engagement efforts and discussed potential opportunities for enhancements moving forward. Ms. Olsen also welcomed the following individual who participated in the discussion of this item:

- Esperanza Vielma, Environmental Justice for Clean Water & Café COOP

Dr. Sherriffs thanked Ms. Olsen and Ms. Vielma for the great presentation and spoke on the great opportunity for collaboration and engagement efforts.

Public Comment: None

Moved: Reyna
Seconded: Escutia-Braaton

Ayes: Bessinger, Couch, Escutia-Braaton, Lewis, Mendes, Pacheco-Werner, Pareira, Preciado, Reyna, Rickman, Robinson, Sherriffs, Shuklian, Chiesa

Nays: None

Motion unanimously carried to accept an Environmental Protection Agency Environmental Justice Government-to-Government Program (EJG2G) Grant in the amount of \$1,000,000 to build outreach and community engagement capacity in local organizations and work with these organizations to provide free residential air purifier devices through the Valley; to authorize the Board Chair, with Executive Director/Air Pollution Control Officer recommendation, to enter into any necessary agreements with EPA; and to authorize the Executive Director/APCO to enter into any sub-agreements under the EPA EJG2G Grant, as necessary to implement the program under the approved funding.

12. ZERO-EMISSION HEAVY DUTY VEHICLE AND EQUIPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES – Tom Jordan introduced reports from state agencies that are coordinating to ensure that the necessary utility upgrades and fueling infrastructure are planned for and deployed to support California’s goal to transition the majority of mobile sources to zero emissions (electric/hydrogen) in the coming decades, and discuss opportunities for engaging with relevant state agencies, utilities, and Valley stakeholders in a supportive role. Mr. Jordan welcomed the following individuals who participated in the discussion of this item:

- Hannah Walter, California Transportation Commission
- Roger Isom, California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association and Western Agricultural Processors Association
- Analisa Bevan, CARB
- Gia Vacin, California Governor’s Office of Business & Economic Development (GO-Biz)
- Maggie Deng, California Energy Commission
- Paula Gruending, California Public Utilities Commission

Mr. Sheikh thanked the speakers for their participation and presentations on this complex topic, and asked the panelists if the current processes have the state on track to meet the ambitious goals. Ms. Bevan responded that the process is taking place over time and agreed there will be challenges and will require regular communication to keep dialogue going and find ways to solve challenges.

Mr. Chiesa spoke about the large number of trucks that will be ineligible for registration renewal and shared his concern for people who will be unable to work because of this issue.

Dr. Pacheco-Werner asked the panel to explain any plans to address the concerns brought up today regarding infrastructure and how pricing will affect

ratepayers. Ms. Gruending responded that there will need to be consideration taken to explore funding available to assist with infrastructure that can help offset the ratepayers' responsibility.

Dr. Pacheco-Werner shared a concern about whether there will be enough OEM vehicles and infrastructure to make hydrogen a viable zero-emission option. Ms. Vacin responded that there is sufficient demand for hydrogen in vehicles and the importance of matching supply and demand. She also spoke about the need for reliable fueling infrastructure for hydrogen vehicles.

Supervisor Pereira inquired about where the California electric grid is in relation to being able to provide the electricity needed to support the transition to zero-emissions. Ms. Gruending responded that she did not have a specific answer as this point, but that there is current work ongoing to analyze and identify the forecasted supply and demand.

Supervisor Couch asked how much of the state's electricity is currently generated from natural gas or fossil fuels. Ms. Deng responded electricity in California is mainly generated from natural gas currently. Supervisor Couch requested that the presenters report back to their respective agencies that we would clean the air if we produced more fossil fuels domestically rather than importing it from other countries with less standards.

Supervisor Rickman expressed concerns with the lack of infrastructure to support the goals and mandates by the state.

Mayor Preciado spoke about the need for the information being presented today to be presented to rural disadvantaged communities.

Dr. Sherriffs shared his optimism for the long-term goals shared, but feels there is a need to improve upon the short-term planning issues.

Supervisor Robinson commented that he supports the clean fuel initiatives, but sees the need for flexibility and support of the people who will potentially be out of business.

Public Comment:

- John Sanders, Resident
- Ed Ward, Valley Pacific Petroleum
- Kevin Abernathy, Milk Producers Council & Dairy Cares
- Maryn Pitt, Manufacturers Council of Central Valley
- Esperanza Vielma, EJCW

13. THE DISTRICT S.T.A.R. (SERVICE, TEAMWORK, ATTITUDE AND RESPECT) WORK CULTURE – Samir Sheikh and Chenecua Dixon, Director of Personnel, provided an overview of the District's STAR work culture and the success the District has experienced when implementing this culture at all levels of the

organization and fostering, cultivating and preserving a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Mr. Sheikh shared the importance of this culture and explained how committed the District is to employee welfare and wellbeing, along with providing exceptional customer service. The following District staff members each provided testimony on how the District's STAR work culture has enriched their work experience and positively impacted their lives:

- Tammy Howe, Executive Assistant
- Marissa Gomez, Programmer Analyst
- Celina Chavez, Air Quality Specialist
- Mark Rasmussen, Compliance Manager
- Shamara Elkins, Air Quality Specialist

Chair Chiesa commented on how impressed he has been with the STAR culture and the employees he has worked with at the District.

Supervisor Robinson, as a recently appointed Board Member, spoke about the welcoming and positive atmosphere from the first time he came to the District.

Councilmember Lewis thanked the staff for making the experience for Board Members so enjoyable.

Councilmember Reyna shared his experience with the District staff and their willingness to help and genuine friendliness.

Supervisor Pareira expressed his appreciation for the amazing work that staff do and the positive working environment at the District.

Mayor Preciado shared his appreciation to the commitment, hard work, and knowledge of the District staff.

Public Comment: None

14. UPDATE FROM SJVAPCD EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION – Nathan Trevino, President of the SJVAPCD Employees' Association, gave a brief update to the Board on the Association's positive and proactive relationship with the District.
15. DEPLOYMENT OF NEW INFORMATION SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE SERVICE AND EFFICIENCY – Imtiaz Haq, Director of Information Systems and Technology, provided an update on key information technology projects that have been recently completed, are in the process of development, or are planned to be completed in the near term.
16. PUBLIC COMMENT – No public comments were made during this time.
17. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/APCO COMMENTS – Mr. Sheikh expressed his gratitude for the great turnout by the Board. Mr. Sheikh shared his appreciation for the Board, the Executive team, managers, and staff for their contributions to

making this a successful meeting. Mr. Sheikh spoke about the important feedback received that will assist in guiding the District moving forward.

18. **GOVERNING BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS** – Chair Chiesa thanked everyone for their participation and recognized the value in coming together for two days as a Board. Councilmember Escutia-Braaton thanked Mr. Sheikh and the staff for a great job and enjoyed getting to know everyone better. Supervisor Rickman voiced his appreciation for this great event.

ADJOURN – Chair Chiesa adjourned the meeting at 2:46 p.m.