



SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRAND JURY NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 10, 2024

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Infighting and Turmoil Drown Florin County Water District

Drinking water for nearly 8,000 county residents depends on the tiny Florin County Water District, but the Sacramento County Grand Jury's eight-month investigation finds the elected board and the staff virtually paralyzed by internal strife and severely unprepared for future challenges.

"The Florin County Water District (FCWD) faces huge financial, infrastructure, and water management challenges that it isn't prepared for," said Steve Caruso, Grand Jury foreperson. "The Grand Jury's investigation found the Board members can't reach agreements to set long-term policy, and they fight constantly among themselves and with the interim general manager."

While boasting low water rates – some customers pay as little as \$20 per month – FCWD could soon be overwhelmed by the costs of installation and operation of state-mandated water meters, as well as future infrastructure upgrades and maintenance on its 65-year-old system.

Established in 1959, FCWD once served a farming community known for growing strawberries. But, FCWD now serves few agricultural customers. It covers a 2.5 square mile area, bounded roughly by Florin Road on the north, Gerber Road on the south, Power Inn Road on the west and Gardner Avenue on the east. With 10 groundwater wells, FCWD serves a customer base made up of residential, small commercial, and few large water users, such as Pepsi and Mission Laundry.

"For decades, no one was watching what the FCWD was doing," Caruso said. "As an independent special district, the elected board is answerable only to its constituents. If customers and voters aren't involved, there is no check on the system."

After receiving two citizen complaints about FCWD, the Grand Jury opened an investigation that included conducting 20 interviews. What the Grand Jury found was an

elected board that for 25 years had turned over policy making and operations to a former general manager. When the former general manager abruptly retired in 2022, the Board was in disarray.

“Board members had no training in how to serve as an elected official and no policy handbooks to follow,” Caruso said. “Board meetings became chaotic with bickering taking precedence over governance.”

The Grand Jury report includes 15 recommendations for ways to improve operations at the FCWD. Those recommendations include the FCWD Board receiving training in elected official behavior, and adopting official policies and procedures. FCWD also is encouraged to join with other Sacramento County water agencies to learn more about regional groundwater management procedures and work to prepare for the impact of climate change on drought.

The Sacramento County Grand Jury is the independent watchdog over public entities within the county. Concerned residents can contact the Grand Jury on a confidential basis through written complaints that alert the Grand Jury to issues within public entities. We would like to hear from you at www.sacgrandjury.org.