



San Lorenzo Valley Water District

Encouraging the Flow of Information to the Public

Summary

Since mid-2016 the San Lorenzo Valley Water District (SLVWD or District) has struggled to address public concerns about a number of controversial issues. The administration of the Lompico surcharge and capital projects, use of glyphosate in the watershed, and a lawsuit involving a former Board member, were among the issues that drew sharp criticism from citizen groups and the press. The criticisms tested the capacity of the District's representatives to maintain productive and civil interactions with the community and, at times, with one another.

Although the Lompico surcharge has now been eliminated, other disputes and communication challenges remain. Issues such as the District's handling of legal matters, management of the Lompico Assessment District and capital projects, and support for the Lompico citizen oversight committee continue to be divisive. In addition, District changes to meeting practices in 2017 have reduced public access to the debate and decision-making process and compromised the community's understanding of the issues.

Better communication on difficult matters, an informed and effective Assessment District oversight committee, and an unwavering commitment to public access, will enable greater transparency and may restore trust and foster better relationships within the SLVWD community.

Role of the Grand Jury

A special note: The Grand Jury conducts all investigations in a confidential manner. Witnesses are admonished not to disclose their contacts with the Grand Jury. In the course of this investigation, however, several interested parties made public statements asserting that an investigation was underway, including speculation about the likely focus and outcome. Thus, it is appropriate to clarify the proper role of the Grand Jury, including its statutory limitations.

The primary function of a civil grand jury is to investigate the function of local government agencies, publish its findings, and recommend ways to improve governmental operations.^[1]

The Grand Jury has no power to remedy individual situations. It cannot vindicate the positions of aggrieved parties nor right past wrongs. The strength of a grand jury investigative report comes from informing the public about the practices of local governmental bodies, with the expectation that an informed public will ensure effective government.

Background

The Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury issued a report in 2014 regarding the San Lorenzo Valley Water District's lack of transparency in dealing with the public.^[2] In the wake of that report, the District made a number of positive changes to expand access to the workings of the District, including providing better information in its annual reports and arranging for Community Television of Santa Cruz County (CTV) to record video of all regular Board of Directors meetings. It also made notable organizational and administrative changes. It brought in new senior staff in 2015; it completed its annexation of the Lompico County Water District in 2016; and in the Fall of 2017, it obtained a significant increase in water rates, paving the way for a 10-year capital improvement program to upgrade infrastructure throughout the District.

Since 2016 the District has come under fire again for its lack of transparency. The key issues concern the administration of the conditions of the Lompico merger, as well as the District's handling of several controversial matters. The Grand Jury sought to understand public concerns and to investigate the District's current standards for accountability and transparency.

LCWD-SLVWD Merger

Financial problems, an aging infrastructure, and the threat of state intervention obliged the Lompico County Water District (LCWD) to look to SLVWD for help in 2013. After two years of complex negotiations, SLVWD agreed to annex LCWD if Lompico ratepayers would pass a bond issue to fund infrastructure improvements, and agree to pay a surcharge to cover extra costs related to integrating Lompico operations into SLVWD. The conditions were laid out formally in [Resolution 953-A](#), which all parties refer to as the “merger agreement.” Similarly, while the transaction is more correctly termed an annexation, all parties refer to it as the “merger.”

A bond issue to provide SLVWD with immediate funding for the Lompico infrastructure projects failed by a narrow margin in 2015. The parties then agreed to the formation of an assessment district as a “similar revenue instrument” which would collect the required funds over a 10-year period. In addition, the parties retained the requirement that SLVWD would create a “Lompico oversight committee.”^[3] The assessment district passed in a new ballot measure in March 2016, clearing the way for the merger on June 1, 2016.

By October 2016, Lompico ratepayers were already arguing that changed financial circumstances had reduced the need for the surcharge specified in Resolution 953-A. First, during the year between the failure of the bond initiative vote and the success of the assessment district vote, LCWD passed a significant rate hike, which put it in better financial shape than the merger agreement had contemplated.^[4] Second, SLVWD decided to immediately install a temporary supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) system and replace water meters. Those actions substantially reduced the financial burden of integrating and operating the Lompico service area by eliminating the need for workers to monitor water storage tank levels and read the meters in Lompico manually.^[5]

Lompico ratepayers requested a speedy review of the 5-year surcharge, with the goal of bringing the surcharge to an early end. For its part, the District asserted that it needed time to understand the Lompico audited financial statements and future demands. The surcharge review process began ten months later, in April 2017. Over the months of discussions about the surcharge, the public and the District traded accusations that the other was not listening. Civility declined.

While the surcharge involved several hundred thousand dollars over five years, an early controversy arose over a set of mapping charges for three Zayante parcels totalling just \$20,847.^[6] ^[7] ^[8] The charges were not part of the Lompico merger, but the District included them in the original computation of LCWD’s transferred liabilities anyway.^[9] ^[10] ^[11] Including these mapping charges meant that Lompico ratepayers would pay for them indirectly through the monthly surcharge. Later, in the course of forecasting whether the surcharge was still needed, the District removed the mapping charges, but did not publicize the change to concerned citizens. The surcharge issue eventually came to a resolution, but because of communication issues, like the Zayante mapping charges, mistrust and dialog problems remained.

Another condition of the merger, the 10-year Assessment District, provided \$2.75 million to fund a set of capital improvement projects specified in the accompanying Engineer's Report.^[12] It also provided for the collection of an additional \$183,000 for interest payments on anticipated loans taken against future Assessment District collections. The Engineer's Report lists the Lompico capital improvement projects and the estimated cost of each project. It contains few other details about the projects or their implementation.

Since the merger, District representatives and members of the public have raised financial issues not addressed in either the merger agreement or the Engineer's Report. These concerns include questions about what adjustments are possible under the Assessment District (AD) if some projects come in substantially over or under budget, or if the District obtains grants to fund any of the listed projects.^[13]^[14] Other questions have focused on the disposition of the funds collected over the years for loan interest if no loans are obtained.^[15] Still other financial concerns are centered on what would happen with the designated AD funds if a listed project is later determined to be unnecessary.^[16]

The construction timeline has been another area of concern. Public discussions and presentations before the merger had laid out the District's plans to start the Lompico projects shortly after the merger, with funding coming from loans taken out against the AD.^[17]^[18] After the merger however, the District staff investigated loan funding and reported back that it found fewer acceptable loan opportunities than it had anticipated. Instead, the District opted for pay-as-you-go construction funding for most years, with a possible bridge loan in years four through seven.^[19]^[20]

In September 2017 the District was successful in obtaining substantial increases in water rates for the next five years to fund capital improvements. This success allowed the District to update its Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to go forward on several critical, long-delayed pre-merger projects.

The new CIP, introduced in November 2017, specifies all District projects for the next 10 years, including all of the Lompico projects identified in the Assessment District Engineer's Report.^[21] The CIP assigns priority rankings to each project. Under this new plan, Lompico projects are still scheduled to be completed within 10 years, but have a lower priority for completion than a number of projects in other service areas.^[22]

Lompico ratepayers have expressed their concerns that the lower priority ranking of the Assessment District projects might lead to delays and higher construction costs, with a possible consequence that some of the AD projects might not be done.

Lompico Assessment District Oversight Committee (LADOC)

The LCWD-SLVWD merger agreement required the formation of a "bond oversight committee." To address that requirement, the District created an oversight committee, later named the Lompico Assessment District Oversight Committee (LADOC), consisting of five citizens from the Lompico service area. The responsibilities and boundaries of LADOC's role were the subject of early debate.

SLVWD updated its policy manual to add the new oversight committee.^[23] It then solicited applicants.^[24] The policy manual described the committee's role in broad terms:

The Committee shall be responsible to review matters of stewardship, design, construction, replacement, and repair of the District facilities and property directly related to Assessment District 2016-1, the Lompico Service Area.^[25]

LADOC's opening meeting was August 23, 2016. At its second meeting, held on October 6, 2016, the committee decided to pursue several open questions and issues that appeared to fall under its purview. Less than two weeks later, at the October 16, 2016 Board of Directors meeting, the Board debated the reduction of LADOC's duties,^[26] by changing the description of its role to one which it said more closely resembled the wording of the merger agreement.^[27] At the next Board meeting, the SLVWD policy manual was amended to read:

The Committee shall be responsible to review matters of revenue and expenses directly related to Assessment District 2016-1 projects.^{[28] [29]}

District representatives refer to this one sentence description of the responsibilities of LADOC as the LADOC "charter."^[30] The responsibilities of LADOC continue to be the subject of discussion and disagreement.^[31]

Public Meetings and Other Communication Practices

SLVWD is responsible for setting the tone for communications with the public.^[32] The communication environment includes the policies and procedures for Board meetings and other interactions with the public. The communication environment also encompasses the care the District takes to provide an atmosphere conducive to public engagement.

Communication problems came to the forefront in 2017. The District received public criticism not only for its handling of several controversial matters, but also for its handling of the resulting public fallout. During the same period, the District also instituted changes to its meeting practices that had the effect of reducing public participation and understanding. Among other changes, the District switched from holding mostly regular meetings of the Board to holding mostly special meetings of the Board, which were far less likely to be video recorded by Community TV.^{[33] [34]} It also switched from detailed minutes to brief "action minutes."^[35]

Scope of Grand Jury Investigation

From July 2017 through April 2018, the Grand Jury looked into SLVWD interactions with the public in three broad areas:

- Assessment District 2016-1, including:
 - the planning and execution of the capital improvement projects for the Lompico service area pursuant to the LCWD-SLVWD merger agreement
 - the ranking and integration of Assessment District projects into the District-wide CIP plan
- Lompico Assessment District Oversight Committee (LADOC):
 - the responsibilities of the committee established to oversee the Assessment District collections and project expenditures
 - District support of the oversight committee
- the communication environment, including:
 - District practices related to public access, transparency, financial oversight, civility and decorum, and
 - handling of controversial matters

Methodology and Approach

The Grand Jury:

- conducted a series of interviews with individuals affiliated with SLVWD as well as with District ratepayers and others with relevant knowledge
- reviewed internal SLVWD documents and communications among SLVWD Board and staff, as well as SLVWD communications with the public
- reviewed agendas, minutes, meeting notes, and where available, videos and audios of the meetings of the SLVWD Board of Directors and its five committees
- attended meetings of the SLVWD Board and its committees
- reviewed documents and other materials related to the merger of LCWD and SLVWD
- reviewed SLVWD policy and procedure manuals, as well as resolutions and proposals concerning changes to these documents
- reviewed audited financial statements, forecasts, interim financial reports, bill lists, studies (e.g. water rates), and similar financial materials
- reviewed strategic plans, capital improvement project plans, requests for proposals (RFPs), engineering reports, [Gantt charts](#), and similar technical materials
- conducted online research about SLVWD, LCWD, and other local water districts, as well as research about assessment districts and oversight committees
- reviewed applicable California codes and regulations

Investigation

Assessment District 2016-1

In its investigation of the Assessment District (AD), the Grand Jury found notable differences in understanding among District representatives regarding the construction strategy for the AD's projects, including District plans in the event of project delays, cost differences, or possible changes in projects undertaken.

While the District recognizes that AD funds may be used only for the benefit of Lompico, understandings differ among decision makers on what flexibility exists under the AD as written. Varying interpretations of the Assessment District terms have, in several cases, led to conflicting assertions made to the Grand Jury or to the public, about:

- the process for changing or removing projects from the Engineer's Report list^[36]
- the possibility of reducing Assessment District collections in later years^[37]
- ending the Assessment District early^{[38] [39] [40]}
- whether the AD is collecting interest on a future loan^[41]
- whether obtaining a loan against the AD is required^[42]
- using the \$183,000 collected for loan interest for other AD expenses^[43]
- returning unused funds to the ratepayers^{[44] [45]}
- postponing the completion of Assessment District capital projects beyond ten years^[46]

The Grand Jury has found that, nearly two years after the merger, District representatives still communicate differing views of the AD and its projects. The varying interpretations have caused public concern, and warrant serious and sustained discussion.

Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

The District-wide Capital Improvement Program introduced in November 2017 has presented another communication challenge. The District used a priority rating system to rank each capital project, which resulted in a timetable for the execution of each project on the list. The CIP assumes, however, that there are no differences between Lompico and non-Lompico projects except for the funding source; that is, that the projects for which Lompico ratepayers pay an extra assessment have no special status. In contrast, Lompico ratepayers contend that they gave their vote to accept the Assessment District in exchange for the District's promise to complete the specific projects listed in the Engineer's Report in an expeditious manner.^[47]

The November 2017 Capital Improvement Program still meets expectations to do all AD projects and to do them within 10 years of the merger, but it also incorporates delays of five months to three years for several AD projects. (See Table A below.) The substantial increase in water rates, passed in September 2017, has allowed several pre-merger capital projects to go forward immediately. Now those projects and the AD projects must vie for the time and attention of the small professional staff who will manage the District strategy for permitting, planning, construction, and financing of multiple projects.

The following table, Table A, shows the original and changed estimated start dates for all of the Assessment District projects listed in the Engineer’s Report.

Table A: Scheduled Start Dates for AD Projects in 2017 District Gantt Charts

Assessment District Projects ^[48]	Cost (\$)	Project Timeline (Gantt) 2/01/17 ^[49]	Project Timeline (Gantt-CIP) 11/16/17 ^[50]	Approximate Months early / (delayed)
Service Line and Meter Replacements	862,500			
Meters & Private PRVs		7/1/16	7/1/16	0
Laterals		4/3/17	4/3/17	0
Tank Replacement	682,500			
Lewis		1/18/17	11/13/17	(10)
Madrone		7/20/20	12/7/20	(5)
Kaski		7/10/23	6/19/23	1
PRV Replacement	358,000	4/3/17	1/1/18	(8)
Refurbish Mill Creek WTP	105,000	7/19/21	7/15/24	(36)
Distribution System Interconnection	301,000	7/17/17	8/6/18	(13)
SCADA System	441,000*	7/22/19	7/22/19	0

*Includes \$19,540 for a temporary SCADA, not addressed in the Engineer's Report, installed in 2016 ^[51]

Lompico Assessment District Oversight Committee (LADOC)

The parties to the merger of LCWD and SLVWD agreed to keep the original wording of the merger agreement, Resolution 953-A, to avoid renegotiations that would have delayed the merger.^[52] ^[53] Instead, the stakeholders relied on one another to honor the intent of the merger agreement, even if the words did not fully match the actual elements of the merger.^[54] ^[55]

A condition of the merger, Section 7(B) of Resolution 953-A, required the formation of a “bond oversight committee.”^[56] A bond oversight committee has clearly recognized duties and responsibilities. The California Taskforce on Bond Accountability identifies guidelines for local agencies to follow^[57] regarding the establishment and maintenance of “internal control systems to account for and report on the expenditure of funds.”^[58]

By requiring the formation of a bond oversight committee, the merger agreement, in effect, required a formal control system to ensure fiduciary care of the funds collected. The parties agreed that the Assessment District was a “similar revenue instrument” to a bond. The Grand Jury found no evidence to suggest that the parties agreed to a lower standard of oversight and fiduciary care for the Assessment District than the accepted standards for oversight of the proceeds of a bond issue.

Guidelines, charters, and bylaws from a variety of organizations addressing both bonds^{[59] [60] [61]} and assessment districts^{[62] [63]} show oversight responsibilities and practices that reflect the same concerns for the fiduciary care of funds. The state Taskforce on Bond Accountability describes several responsibilities for bond oversight, including creating a transparent control environment; assessing, monitoring and mitigating risk; and maintaining internal controls to ensure that the agency is “properly receiving, managing, and disbursing bond funds.”^[64]

Creating the control environment is key to all of the oversight responsibilities. The control environment prescribes seating qualified people, providing them with appropriate policies and procedures to direct their efforts, and granting them the authority they need to perform the oversight role.

Experts on oversight committees advise that members of these committees receive training, along with others in their agency who will play a role in the administration of the funds.^{[65] [66]} LADOC members have not received formal training in assessment districts, or in other key areas, such as special district governance and meeting management.^[67] For the first 14 months of its existence, the committee also did not receive support from senior financial staff, who might have provided valuable guidance in the absence of relevant formal training.^[68]

The District policy manual describes LADOC’s responsibilities in one sentence, without supporting details. In contrast, expert groups provide detailed guidelines for oversight efforts.^[69]

Oversight Committee Duties and Support ^{[70] [71] [72] [73] [74]}

At minimum, adequate guidance and support for LADOC would include:

- Comprehensive orientation prior to beginning work
- Members handbook of key documents, including items such as a LADOC charter (description of duties), the Engineer’s Report, relevant resolutions,^{[75] [76] [77] [78]} relevant District policies and procedures, project descriptions, budgets and schedules, financial reports, minutes of prior meetings, guides to Brown Act and parliamentary procedures
- Regular meeting schedule, at least quarterly

Expected duties of the oversight committee would include:

- Tracking expenditures of assessment proceeds back to the capital improvement plan
- Actively reviewing and reporting on the proper expenditure of assessment money for the Lompico construction and replacement projects listed in the Engineer’s Report
- Maintaining a committee webpage with (1) detailed information about the progress of each project, (2) committee minutes, and (3) materials it has received
- Preparing and publishing an annual report for ratepayers

Expected duties of the District would include:

- Providing timely, comprehensive data to the oversight committee, including financial reports that display original budget, current budget, actual expenditures, budget balance, and approved commitments to projects to date across all fiscal years
- Providing technical and administrative assistance

As listed above, one of the expected duties of an oversight committee is the production of an annual report. LADOC did not produce such a report, nor did the Board request that LADOC produce one.

In April 2017 the Board received a staff memo indicating that it would be “appropriate for the full Board to periodically review progress” of LADOC and to “provide guidance regarding committee functions, goals and objectives.”^[79] Other communications indicated that senior staff declined to attend LADOC meetings beginning in April 2017.^[80] LADOC meeting notes and internal emails from April 2017, and subsequent Grand Jury interviews, confirm that LADOC sought more support from the Board and staff, but the District did not have the resolve to provide effective support.^[81] ^[82] ^[83] The Grand Jury also determined that opinions differ within the District concerning the utility of LADOC and its appropriate responsibilities as a standing committee.^[84]

In October 2017, the Board considered a staff memo proposing to restrict LADOC meetings and responsibilities further -- that is, to a once-a-year, after-the-fact review of AD project expenditures.^[85] While the Board did not accept the proposal, the ensuing debate made clear that the District has not granted LADOC the authority to perform the oversight role that Resolution 953-A required. The debate also illustrated the District’s lack of recognition that it has an obligation to support a fully functioning oversight committee.^[86]

In sum, the Grand Jury found that the lack of consensus about the role of LADOC, combined with insufficient training and lack of effective support, prevented LADOC from fulfilling its responsibilities in its first year of existence.

Public Meetings and Other Communications

Meeting practices are key communication elements. Policies and procedures that promote public understanding and participation in Board and committee meetings create a trust environment. Policies and procedures that tend to restrict public understanding and participation risk public complaints and a breakdown in civility and decorum in times of controversy.

The Grand Jury looked at meeting and communication practices of nearby water districts and compared them to SLVWD’s practices in 2016 and 2017. It found that in 2016, the District excelled in practices such as publishing comprehensive minutes and arranging for Community TV filming of regular Board meetings. Unfortunately, in 2017, both the written and electronic recording of District meetings took a step backwards.

Recording Board Proceedings – Videos and Published Minutes

In 2016 the District held 24 Board of Directors meetings – 21 regular Board meetings and four special Board meetings with limited agendas. Of those 24 meetings, Community Television of Santa Cruz County (CTV) recorded 19. In contrast, in 2017 the District held 30 Board of Directors meetings – 10 regular Board meetings and 20 special Board meetings. CTV recorded just 13 of the 30 Board meetings, mostly the regular Board meetings.

As Table B shows, CTV recorded only three of the 20 special Board meetings in 2017. Two of the unrecorded special meetings had multi-item agendas indistinguishable from regular meeting agendas. The relative lack of CTV coverage of special meetings reduced access to ratepayers who could not attend those meetings.

Table B: Regular and Special Board of Directors Meetings, 2016 and 2017

	2016	2017
Regular Board of Directors Meetings	21	10
-- Minutes Posted on SLVWD website	21	10
-- CTV Videos Posted on SLVWD website	18	9
-- CTV Videos Available at CTV	18	10
Special Board of Directors Meetings	4	20
-- Limited Agenda	4	15
-- Full (multi-item) Agenda	0	5
-- Minutes Posted on SLVWD website	3	19
-- CTV Videos Posted on SLVWD website	0	2
-- CTV Videos Available at CTV	1	3
Total Board of Directors Meetings	24	30
CTV Videos Available at CTV	19	13
% of Meeting Videos	79%	43%

In 2016 the District produced detailed minutes of the Board of Directors meetings. With the January 17, 2017 Board of Directors meeting, the District switched to “action minutes,” which do not provide any insight into the decisions because they omit the Board discussions and details of public input.

The 2017 elimination of detailed minutes, combined with the relative lack of CTV coverage of the numerous special meetings, reduced publicly available sources of information about District issues for all ratepayers not in attendance at the meetings.

Recording Board Proceedings -- Audio recordings

In late 2017, the District began recording audios of all Board and committee meetings. While the District currently has no written retention policy for audios, it informed the Grand Jury that it destroys all audios after 30 days pursuant to Government Code section 54953.5, subdivision (b). That section provides for a minimum retention period of 30 days; it does not *require* destruction of the media after 30 days or at any particular time in the future.^[87]

The Board of Directors meeting of November 9, 2017 illustrates the communication problems that the stated destruction practice creates.^[88] CTV did not record that meeting. The meeting included a discussion of proposed changes to rates and charges for the Bear Creek Wastewater Enterprise. In the absence of either a recording of the proceedings or detailed meeting minutes, ratepayers not in attendance are unable to access the important discussions that took place.

In the same November 9, 2017 meeting, an exchange among Board members arose over a procedural point addressed in the policy manual. The issue was whether an individual Board member could direct the District Manager to perform an administrative task, or if the task request required Board authorization. Two Board members asserted that Board authorization was not required; the remaining Board members did not challenge the assertion.^[89] The Grand Jury could verify this exchange on its copy of the audio. In the January 18, 2018 Board of Directors meeting, the procedural issue surfaced again. In this instance however, two other directors made the opposite assertion about policy; that is, that an individual Board member could *not* task the District Manager without Board authorization.^[90] Without a publicly-available recording of the November 9, 2017 meeting, interested parties cannot verify, or challenge with confidence, possible contradictory assertions or misstatements.

The District's stated destruction practice for audios implies that community members not only need to make a Public Records Request (PRR) for a recording, but need to make it within 30 days. Having to make a PRR creates an impediment to accessing the discussions and information from the meetings.

In February 2018, the Grand Jury observed that the District began a new project to embed the District's official audios in the pdf files of the action minutes which are posted on the SLVWD website. Unfortunately, the embedded recordings do not function consistently across browsers and devices. The current system leaves out the many users of unsupported devices. If the new system can be made more universally accessible, then it could make a positive contribution to public engagement.

Communication Environment

The approved policy manual for 2017 urges District representatives to "Establish and maintain an environment that encourages the open exchange of ideas and information between Board members, staff and the public that is positive, honest, concise, understandable, responsive and cost-efficient."^[91]

The November 2017 draft revised policy manual proposes similar language to encourage District representatives "(i) to use the Golden Rule (treating others as one would wish to be treated) as a guide in interactions with the media, the SLV community, District management and employees and other Board members and (ii) to speak candidly and forthrightly about the issues in front of the Board of Directors."^[92]

Both the current and proposed policy manuals clearly encourage civility. In routine meeting settings, District representatives do interact civilly with one another and with the public. In the past two years, however, the District has had to address a number of

difficult and controversial matters. Criticism from the public, at times harsh and personal, and disagreements among the District representatives, created lapses in decorum and civility in a number of public meetings as well as on social media.^{[93] [94] [95] [96]} These lapses have led, in turn, to public frustration, and the unwelcome prospect of continuing friction on issues of long-term concern to all parties.

Contentious matters that dominated 2017 and will be of ongoing concern include the following items:

Lompico Merger. After the June 2016 merger, the Lompico surcharge became a divisive issue for more than a year. Although the surcharge has ended, the administration of the Assessment District will be an ongoing activity for eight more years. The issues surrounding the administration and oversight of the Assessment District, especially the decisions necessary for successful completion of the required capital projects, are complex. While the District has the responsibility to create and execute the AD project strategy, transparency dictates regular and substantive communications about that strategy, including changes in timing, funding priorities, and regulatory hurdles.

Legal Fees. In each of the previous three fiscal years, legal fees were under \$100,000. In contrast, in the first four months of the 2017-2018 fiscal year, the District had already spent \$108,000 of its \$140,000 budget on legal fees, much of it related to a long-running set of legal actions involving a former Board member. In anticipation of additional litigation, the District raised its budget for legal fees by \$204,500, to a total of \$344,500.^{[97] [98]} Legal fees now represent a material portion of the District's annual budget for administrative professional services. The confidential nature of legal work means that the District has a continuing challenge to explain and justify expensive and controversial legal strategies to an inquiring public.^{[99] [100]}

Relationship with Citizen Groups and the Press. The local newspaper, along with other media outlets and citizen groups on social media, were critical of the comportment of District representatives at public meetings throughout 2017. The surcharge, the use of [glyphosate](#) in the watershed, and District spending on legal matters were especially controversial issues. While some critics may leave the scene, the District would be right to anticipate that the press, citizen groups, and new critics will continue to focus on difficult matters that have become contentious.^{[101] [102]}

Disagreements among District Representatives. The work of the District cannot proceed effectively without robust discussion. When District representatives fail to maintain civil interactions, however, the public may fear that its interests are at risk. Ratepayers expect discussions at public meetings to focus solely on outcomes, not on personal differences.^{[103] [104]}

Personal Expressions. District representatives have the right to put forth their personal views about SLVWD matters in public forums. The policy manual requires only that such expressions be clearly designated as an individual's opinions and not declarations of the District's official views. Regardless of whether that policy is followed, criticism of colleagues in social media may have a negative long-term impact on public perception of, and respect for, all representatives of the District.^[105]

Findings

- F1.** The lack of effective communication between the District and the community regarding the administration of the Assessment District has caused public concern regarding the timing and implementation of Assessment District projects.
- F2.** The District has not provided adequate authority, guidance, training, or support to the Lompico Assessment District Oversight Committee (LADOC) to ensure that the committee can fulfill its assessment district oversight responsibilities, thus reducing transparency and accountability to the public.
- F3.** Lack of effective District communication practices has reduced public access to the decision-making process, and contributed to acrimony and on-going relationship challenges with the community, causing stress on elected officials and staff, as well as frustration among ratepayers.

Recommendations

- R1.** LADOC should produce an annual report detailing the status of Assessment District revenues and expenditures.(F1, F2)
- R2.** The District should schedule annual public study sessions or workshops to review the LADOC annual report and discuss the administration of the Assessment District (AD), in order to provide in depth information to the public about the timing, funding, and execution of AD projects. (F1, F3)
- R3.** The Board and LADOC should work in concert to create a charter for LADOC that describes in detail the committee's responsibilities and its authority to fulfill its oversight role. (F1, F2)
- R4.** The Board should ensure that LADOC receives adequate professional, technical, and administrative support from the District, as well as the authority to carry out its oversight responsibilities. (F2)
- R5.** The District should provide formal training for all LADOC citizen committee members in governance, meeting management, and the Brown Act. (F2)
- R6.** The District should provide formal training about assessment districts to LADOC members and all others involved in the administration of the Assessment District. (F2)
- R7.** The District should record all Board and committee meetings, and post the recordings online for public access. (F3)
- R8.** The District should provide formal training to all Board and committee members and senior staff on how to communicate with the public on contentious issues. (F1, F3)

Required Response

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Respond Within/ Respond By</i>
San Lorenzo Valley Water District Board of Directors	F1 – F3	R1 – R8	90 Days August 29, 2018

Abbreviations and Definitions

- **CIP:** Capital Improvement Program (also called Capital Improvement Plan)
- **CTV:** Community Television of Santa Cruz County
- **Gantt Chart:** “A Gantt chart is a visual view of tasks scheduled over time.”^[105]
- **Glyphosate:** “Glyphosate is an herbicide. It is applied to the leaves of plants to kill both broadleaf plants and grasses.”^[106]
- **LADOC:** Lompico Assessment District Oversight Committee
- **LAFCO:** Local Agency Formation Commission for Santa Cruz County
- **LCWD:** Lompico County Water District
- **Resolution 953-A:** LAFCO resolution (also called the “merger agreement”) approving SLVWD’s annexation of LCWD (also called the “merger”)
- **SCADA:** Supervisory control and data acquisition system
- **SLVWD:** San Lorenzo Valley Water District, also referred to in this report as “the District”

Sources

References

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<http://www.santacruzcourt.org/divisions/jury/grand%20jury>
2. Santa Cruz County Grand Jury. June, 2014. “San Lorenzo Valley Water District, Time to Restore Trust between Voters and District.” Accessed May 15, 2018.
http://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Portals/0/County/GrandJury/GJ2014_final/SLV_Water_District.pdf
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