



**The 2017–2018 Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury
Requires that the
San Lorenzo Valley Water District Board of Directors
Respond to the Findings and Recommendations
Specified in the Report Titled
San Lorenzo Valley Water District
Encouraging the Flow of Information to the Public
by August 29, 2018**

When the response is complete, please

1. Email the completed Response Packet as a file attachment to grandjury@scgrandjury.org, and
2. Print and send a hard copy of the completed Response Packet to

The Honorable Judge John Gallagher
Santa Cruz Courthouse
701 Ocean St.
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Instructions for Respondents

California law PC §933.05 (included [below](#)) requires the respondent to a Grand Jury report to comment on each finding and recommendation within a report. Explanations for disagreements and timeframes for further implementation or analysis must be provided. Please follow the format below when preparing the responses.

Response Format

1. For the Findings included in this Response Packet, select one of the following responses and provide the required additional information:
 - a. **AGREE** with the Finding, or
 - b. **PARTIALLY DISAGREE** with the Finding and specify the portion of the Finding that is disputed and include an explanation of the reasons therefor, or
 - c. **DISAGREE** with the Finding and provide an explanation of the reasons therefor.
2. For the Recommendations included in this Response Packet, select one of the following actions and provide the required additional information:
 - a. **HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**, with a summary regarding the implemented action, or
 - b. **HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE**, with a timeframe or expected date for implementation, or
 - c. **REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS**, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for that analysis or study; this timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report, or
 - d. **WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

Validation

Date of governing body's response approval: **August 16, 2018**

If you have questions about this response form, please contact the Grand Jury by calling 831-454-2099 or by sending an email to grandjury@scgrandjury.org.

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.

- AGREE**
- PARTIALLY DISAGREE** – explain the disputed portion
- DISAGREE** – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The San Lorenzo Valley Water District (District) and its Board of Directors (Board) appreciate the work of the Grand Jury and all of the diligence and time invested over the past term. We agree with the finding and believe “lack of effective communication” actually understates the nature of the broader Assessment District No. 16 (AD-16) concerns, which largely center on confusion about the mechanics of the assessment district and unaligned expectations. Much of the confusion relates to the unexpected direction the Lompico County Water District (Lompico) annexation took after the failure of the original attempt to approve a bond to finance it. We agree it is time to clear up the confusion and move forward with a clearer and broader consensus on the workings of AD-16 for the ratepayers in the assessment area.

Our plans to provide effective communications regarding AD-16 going forward are in our responses to R1 and R2. We have added a plan of action addressing the larger issue of AD-16 mechanics in our response to R6.

- 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.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

We appreciate the work of the Grand Jury in highlighting the lack of a detailed Charter for LADOC and the need to provide additional guidance, training, and support to LADOC committee members. In light of the bond/assessment distinction and commonly held misconceptions about assessment districts generally and the specific function of this oversight committee, a one sentence charter for LADOC is clearly insufficient for communicating the responsibilities of LADOC.

A challenge faced by the District in providing more structure for LADOC is the limited availability of precedent for the specific function of this oversight committee. Most of the precedent that is available is for bond oversight, especially school bond oversight, which is governed by detailed requirements set forth in Proposition 39 and the Education Code. Though LADOC originally was conceived of as a bond oversight committee, it is not exactly the same as a bond oversight committee, although many of the same best practices can be adapted or applied.

Our plan and commitment to create a more detailed Charter for LADOC is in our response to R3.

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.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

We appreciate the work of the Grand Jury and agree with this finding because it highlights an unusual level of acrimony and strained relationships that exist within the District. These issues present significant challenges for all members of the community, including ratepayers, elected officials and staff.

We recognize that a high level of public engagement is desirable in light of public interest and concern regarding the District's activities. Over the past couple of years the District has experimented with a number of ways to try to improve community relations and engagement. These include contracting with Community TV to record regular Board meetings and making these recordings available online. Also, the District switched to action minutes, consistent with best practices, in response to numerous complaints from members of the public resulting from the District's former reliance on detailed meeting minutes.

Not all of the District's efforts to improve communications have been successful. In fact, most efforts have met with mixed reactions. A key challenge is that procedural changes to provide more equal and fair access to all members of the community may be perceived as limiting the participation of others. For example, limiting the time for each speaker at public meetings to three minutes per oral communication period helps to ensure that everyone who wishes to speak gets an equal opportunity to do so. Also, time limitations help prevent meetings from running so long into the night that meaningful attendance becomes prohibitive for some. On the other hand, time limits mean that people who wish to provide more detailed comments or to engage in back and forth dialogue may not have the opportunity to fully engage. There are reasonably held views on both sides of this issue, just as with many other communication challenges. Because of these kinds of challenges, at times the District has vacillated in terms of how best to facilitate communications.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for these kinds of tensions. The District remains open to new ideas and is willing to experiment and try new things. The ultimate goal shared by all members of the Board is to maximize public engagement in a manner that is workable, legal and fair.

Our plan and commitment to address these issues in a manner that is responsive to the Grand Jury report is in our response to R7 and R8.

Recommendations

R1. LADOC should produce an annual report detailing the status of Assessment District revenues and expenditures.(F1, F2)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

We are committed to developing a process and format for a LADOC annual report.

The revised Charter and/or new Bylaws for LADOC (see response to R3) will describe the timeframe and process for producing an annual report. The contents of the annual report should be defined jointly by the District and LADOC.

As soon as possible within the next 6 months, staff will help jump start the process of implementing this recommendation by generating a template to help facilitate the first annual report, giving consideration to the California League of Bond Oversight Committees (CaLBOC) best practices for preparation of an annual report regarding school bond oversight. Staff may consider other relevant guidance and samples available from other sources. It will be up to LADOC to develop and write the substantive content of the report. Based on a cursory review of samples, it looks like oversight committee annual reports often have less than 10 substantive pages, such that writing the report need not be an onerous task for LADOC members.

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)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

We are committed to scheduling annual workshop-style meetings to review the LADOC annual reports, which will include discussion of current information about the timing, funding, and execution of AD-16 projects.

Upon completion by LADOC of its annual report, the District will make the report available on the LADOC page of the District’s website. Also, the District will schedule a joint meeting of the Board and LADOC for the purpose of having LADOC present its report. The format will include a public-workshop style discussion with Q&A.

We will go further than the Grand Jury’s recommendation by creating high-level project summaries for each discrete AD-16 project. Our goal is to post these summaries on the LADOC web page within the next year. The format and initial content should be reviewed and approved by the Board. The summaries will serve an informational function only. They will not create any new or additional commitments on the part of the District. The summaries will be living documents to be updated periodically as circumstances change.

We will also look into creating a role for designated Board and/or staff members to serve as a liaison with LADOC and its chairperson. The purpose of this new role would be to help improve communications and the flow of information between LADOC and the rest of the District.

We believe it is important to note that comments and questions about the implementation of AD-16 projects, including priority, timeline, bidding and design considerations etc., are within the purview of the Engineering Committee and ultimately the Board. We encourage members of the public to bring these types of issues to the Engineering Committee rather than LADOC.

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)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

We are committed to creating a revised Charter that describes in more detail LADOC’s responsibilities and its authority to fulfill its oversight role.

As soon as possible within the next 6 months we will revise the LADOC Charter to replace its current Charter. A draft will be presented to LADOC for its review and comment and to the Board for approval. The revised Charter will be more specific than the current Charter, keeping in mind that a Charter is intended to be a broad statement of purpose and authority, and the core purpose of a citizens’ oversight committee to advise the public as to whether the assessment district funds are being managed in accordance with law.

We will go further than the Grand Jury’s recommendation by including information in the Charter about LADOC membership, meetings, procedures and functions if such information is not provided by other documents such as the Board Manual or new LADOC Bylaws.

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)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

Our plan and commitment is described under R3 to produce a revised Charter as soon as possible within the next 6 months that defines the authority of LADOC to carry out its oversight responsibilities.

We are committed to making adequate professional, technical and administrative support available to LADOC from the District. The bond/assessment distinction presents a challenge because many of the professional resources that exist for bond oversight do not translate perfectly to non-bond assessment oversight. We believe the District has professional expertise up to the task of locating appropriate resources, adapting existing resources, or creating new materials as necessary.

R5. The District should provide formal training for all LADOC citizen committee members in governance, meeting management, and the Brown Act. (F2)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

We are committed to improving the training regimen for Board members and creating one for public members of committees including LADOC.

As soon as possible within the next 6 months, we will make governance, meeting management, and Brown Act training available to all members of the Board and the District's public committee members. Within a year, we will evaluate and select a means of making such training available on a recurring or ongoing basis. For example, staff may consider creating tailored training materials for in-house use and reproduction versus hiring consultants and/or procuring online subscriptions, etc.

We will go further than the Grand Jury's recommendation by including government ethics training for public members of committees as part of the training regimen. Ethics training already is a required and made available for Board members.

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)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe
(not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

Our plan and commitment is described under R5 to make training on key topics available to all Board and public committee members, including LADOC members. For Board and LADOC members, we will have additional training about assessment districts.

The bond/assessment distinction presents a challenge because the formal training that exists for bond oversight does not translate perfectly for non-bond assessment district oversight. We believe the District has professional expertise up to the task of locating or adapting existing training, or creating new materials as necessary.

We will go further than the Grand Jury's recommendation by coming up with a mechanism for posing questions about, e.g., the implications of changes to AD-16 projects, and addressing them.

R7. The District should record all Board and committee meetings, and post the recordings online for public access. (F3)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

We recognize that interested members of the public cannot always attend Board and committee meetings. Accordingly, we are committed to going above and beyond open meeting requirements by recording all Board and committee meetings and posting the recordings online to maximize public access.

As indicated in the Grand Jury report, the District has been experimenting with a technology solution that embeds links to audio recordings of public meetings into the action minutes. This is an elegant solution that couples the clarity of action minutes with detailed information about what was said during the proceedings. Notwithstanding some technical difficulties encountered by the District in rolling out this new technology, it is very close to being implemented. We believe that this can be done within 6 months to a year.

- 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)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe
(not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

Our plan and commitment is described under R5 and R6 to make training on key topics available to all Board and public committee members. For all Board and committee members and senior staff, we will add training on how to communicate with the public on contentious issues.

A challenge is that the District has previously expressed interest in this type of training but did not locate appropriate resources. With additional effort, we believe that something can be located or adapted for this purpose. Ideally the training would be provided by someone familiar with the local community.