



City of Culver City

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Staff Report

File #: 18-01192, **Version:** 1

Item #: A-1.

CC - (1) Presentations and Discussion Regarding the West Basin Ocean Water Desalination Project; and (2) Direction to the City Manager as Deemed Appropriate.

Meeting Date: May 14, 2018

Contact Person/Dept: Helen Chin, Public Works Administration

Phone Number: (310) 253-5618

Fiscal Impact: Yes ☐ No ☒

General Fund: Yes ☐ No ☒

Public Hearing: ☐

Action Item: ☐

Attachments: ☐

Commission Action Required: Yes ☐ No ☒ **Date:**

Public Notification: (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - City Council (05/09/18);

Department Approval: Charles D. Herbertson, Public Works Director/City Engineer (05/03/18)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the City Council (1) receive and discuss presentations from representatives from West Basin regarding its proposed Ocean Water Desalination Project and from representatives of the Desal Response Group regarding the concerns with West Basin's proposal; and (2) provide direction to the City Manager as deemed appropriate.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

West Basin Ocean Water Desalination Project

West Basin Municipal Water District, a wholesale water agency, has proposed an Ocean Water Desalination Project (Project) which would serve as a local water source in its diverse water supply portfolio. This Project seeks to address growing concerns about reliable water supply due to drought, climate change, and unregulated use of groundwater by considering ocean water desalination as a drinking water supply. The proposed Project includes a Local Project, which could produce up to 20 million gallons of water per day (MGD) and a potentially expanded Regional project, which could produce up to 60 MGD. The Project would include three primary components: the construction of a new ocean water desalination facility, an ocean water intake and concentrate discharge system, and

a product water conveyance system. Construction for the Project would take place at the El Segundo Generating Station (ESGS), an existing power plant property, and would make use of the power plant's existing intake tunnels as part of its construction.

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), West Basin has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to detail any significant environmental impacts the project could produce. At the moment, the draft EIR is undergoing a 90-day public review and comment period, which will end on June 25, 2018. (Note, the original review period was 60 days, which was recently extended by the West Basin Board of Directors at its May 3, 2018 special meeting.) A final EIR will be prepared after West Basin reviews comments, prepares responses, and incorporates revisions.

Concerns Regarding West Basin's Ocean Water Desalination Project

At the April 18, 2018 Sustainability Subcommittee meeting, representatives from West Basin presented the Project to the Subcommittee. A representative from a local environmental water group, Desal Response Group, provided public comment about the primary concerns related to the Project. While the concerns were not discussed in detail at the Subcommittee meeting, staff requested a summary of the main points.

The concerns expressed by the Desal Response Group are summarized below:

Environmental Impact and Legal Implications: Seawater intake and brine discharge are the two components of ocean water desalination that can have the most potential for adverse impacts to marine habitat. The intake process could degrade the local marine ecosystem and the discharge of brine and contaminants could harm marine life. The Project must also adhere to the California Coastal Commission Coastal Act policies that protect water quality and marine life.

Cost: Costs to generate electricity in California are increasing, coupled with the energy intensive process to obtain seawater, desalinate, discharge brine, and distribute drinking water. Greenhouse gas emissions from the project can exceed emissions associated with importing water to Southern California. In the example of the desalination project in San Diego, construction and operation resulted in higher costs than originally estimated.

Need: The need for a desalination plant may not be the most sensible solution as there are already statewide initiatives to conserve water and address climate change. Cities are managing their own stormwater and conservation programs, driving down water consumption and managing runoff to recharge groundwater or capturing and treating runoff to irrigate landscaping.

It should be noted, the potential issues with the Project, as summarized above, are those expressed by the Desal Response Group and are not the opinions of staff.

Direction to the City Manager

Staff recommends the City Council discuss the matter and direct the City Manager as deemed appropriate, which could include preparing comments to the Draft EIR. If City Council directs the preparation of comments, it would either be handled in house, or staff would work with a consultant as needed.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

There is no fiscal impact from receiving these presentations.

ATTACHMENTS

1. 2018-05-14 - West Basin Ocean Desal DEIR Overview
2. 2018-05-14 - Desal Response Group Presentation

MOTION

That the City Council:

1. Receive and discuss presentations regarding the West Basin Ocean Water Desalination Project; and
2. Provide direction to the City Manager as deemed appropriate.