



**SAWPA COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
OCTOBER 21, 2025**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Mike Gardner, Chair, Western Municipal Water District
Gil Botello, Vice Chair, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District
Philip E. Paule, Secretary-Treasurer, Eastern Municipal Water District
Jasmin A. Hall, Inland Empire Utilities Agency
Denis Bilodeau, Orange County Water District [via – zoom]

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

None

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT;
NON-VOTING**

Fred Jung, Orange County Water District [via – zoom]
T. Milford Harrison, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District

STAFF PRESENT

Karen Williams, David Ruhl, Shavonne Turner, Dean Unger, John Leete, Alison Lewis, Haley Gohari, Bonnie Fitzgerald, Natalia Gonzalez, Sara Villa, Linda Kim

OTHERS PRESENT

Thomas S. Bunn, Lagerlof, LLP; Ken Tam, Inland Empire Utilities Agency; John Kennedy, Orange County Water District; Adekunle Ojo, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District; Mallory O'Connor, Western Municipal Water District; George Muñoz, City of Riverside

The Regular Meeting of the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority Commission was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chair Gardner on behalf of the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, 11615 Sterling Avenue, Riverside, California, and Denis Bilodeau at 601 N. Ross Street, Room 327, Santa Ana, CA 92701.

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. ROLL CALL

An oral roll call was duly noted and recorded by the Clerk of the Board.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

4. ITEMS TO BE ADDED OR DELETED

There were no items to be added or deleted.

5. CONSENT CALENDAR

Commissioner Botello requested to pull Agenda Item 5.B (Updated to Personnel Handbook Approval) from the Consent Calendar for further review/discussion. Only the meeting minutes from October 7, 2025 (Agenda Item 5.A) were approved as presented.

A. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: OCTOBER 7, 2025

Recommendation: Approve as posted.

MOVED, to approve the October 7, 2025 meeting minutes.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Paule/Hall
Ayes:	Bilodeau, Botello, Gardner, Hall, Paule
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	None
Absent:	None

B. UPDATED PERSONNEL HANDBOOK APPROVAL (CM#2025.74)

Commissioner Botello referenced page 30 of the agenda packet regarding "Observed Holiday Time" and raised a question regarding banking holiday time. It is not customary to allow employees to bank holiday time and suggest that such time is typically required to be used within the same pay period. Karen Williams noted that it's based off holidays that fall on regularly scheduled days off, such as the day after Thanksgiving, when most employees are off on Fridays. In past practice, that day has been "banked."

Commissioner Botello referenced page 35 of the agenda packet regarding "Performance Evaluation", and the process for completing and storing employee evaluation forms. He noted that the forms are completed, reviewed with the employee, and signed electronically. In addition to being stored electronically, is a physical copy of the evaluation kept in the employee's file? Ms. Williams confirmed that no one else, aside from HR, has access to the electronic employee evaluation files. It was also clarified that the employee can request access to their own evaluation if needed, but no one else has access.

Commissioner Botello referenced page 37 of the agenda packet regarding "Change of Personnel Status" and asked if employees can make changes to their benefits themselves, such as adding dependents. If so, what are the steps to ensure the eligibility of dependents and all necessary steps are taken before any changes are processed. Ms. Williams confirmed that while employees can make changes to their benefits, those changes must be reviewed and accepted by HR. Once accepted, the changes are then updated and reflected in the system.

Commissioner Botello requested a copy of the Remote Work Policy and Agreement and raised concerns about the lack of mention regarding background checks in the Personnel Handbook, particularly for positions involving the use of city vehicles. How does SAWPA ensure proper due diligence is being done, especially for employees who may use company vehicles and verify that employees have a valid driver's license and a clean driving record. Ms. Williams clarified that SAWPA participates in the DMV Pull Notice Program, which helps verify the driving records of employees who operate vehicles.

Commissioner Botello also inquired about the military leave benefits for employees called to active duty or reserve service, asking if the benefits last for 31 days, after the 31 days of leave, the employee will no longer receive pay or benefits. Shavonne Turner noted that she would follow up and provide information on the specific language.

MOVED, to approve the updated Personnel Handbook.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Botello/Hall
Ayes:	Botello, Gardner, Hall, Paule
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	None
Absent:	Bilodeau

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **ANNUAL AB 2561 VACANCY AND RECRUITMENT REPORT (CM#2025.75)**

Shavonne Turner provided a presentation titled Annual AB 2561 Vacancy and Recruitment Report, contained in the agenda packet on pages 103-111.

This presentation provides SAWPA's annual update in compliance with AB 2561, which mandates public reporting on staffing vacancies and recruitment activities. The purpose of this update is to maintain transparency regarding staff levels and hiring efforts for the current fiscal year. This report supports transparency and accountability in SAWPA's staffing practices and ensures compliance with AB 2561.

Ms. Turner noted that for Fiscal Year 2025-26, SAWPA has one (1) vacancy: the Water Resources and Planning Manager position. All other positions are currently filled, resulting in a vacancy rate of 3.85%. This means SAWPA is fully staffed and remains in compliance with AB 2561. Recruitment for the Water Resources and Planning Manager position is underway, with the first round of application screening already completed. SAWPA has also enhanced onboarding materials and communication with candidates to ensure strong candidate experience and employee retention. There are no delays or obstacles in the recruitment process.

This effort aligns with SAWPA's critical success factors, including organizational sustainability, maintaining the right team capacity to meet agency goals, fulfilling legal and reporting obligations, and ensuring transparent reporting to both the Commission and the public. These factors ensure that SAWPA remains a high-performing, compliant organization. Additionally, there are no unanticipated resource impacts from this report. Recruitment activities are within the FY 2025-26 budget, reflecting SAWPA's ongoing commitment to fiscal responsibility and efficient operations. There was no discussion.

This item is to receive and file; no action was taken on agenda item no. 6.A.

B. **2026 MEDICAL INSURANCE CAP (CM#2025.76)**

Karen Williams provided a report on the 2026 Medical Insurance Cap, contained in the agenda packet on pages 113-117.

Each year, SAWPA reviews and adjusts the medical insurance cap based on the annual rate increase provided by ACWA. This year, the Kaiser family rate is \$2,258.61, up from last year's rate of \$2,168.93. Staff are requesting that the Commission approve an increase to the cap, aligning it with the Kaiser family rate of \$2,258.61. This rate reflects the Southern California region. Over the past five (5) years, the insurance rate increases have been as follows: 9%, 0%, 0%, 5.8%, and 5.4%, with this year's increase at 4.1%. Given that the increase is under the projected 5% budget, staff recommend that the Commission approve the adjustment to the medical insurance cap. There was no discussion.

MOVED, to direct staff to adjust the medical insurance cap from \$2,168.93 to \$2,258.61, which is equal to the ACWA/JPIA 2026 Kaiser Family Plan rate.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Paule/Botello
Ayes:	Bilodeau, Botello, Gardner, Hall, Paule
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	None
Absent:	None

C. LOBBY SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT (CM#2025.77)

David Ruhl provided a presentation titled SAWPA Lobby Security Improvement Project, contained in the agenda packet on pages 123-130.

The Lobby Security Improvements work began in May 2025 and was completed on October 18, 2025. The improvements were aimed at enhancing the lobby's security while maintaining an open and functional space during business hours. The work included adding a layer of security at the entrance, updating the lobby's appearance and functionality, and making exterior and interior improvements, such as upgrades to the restrooms and the ADA ramp.

Mr. Ruhl noted the improvements are a significant upgrade from the previous lobby, which had marble floors. In particular, the women's restroom has also seen notable enhancements, along with double counters. The contract for this project was awarded to Bridgerock Construction for \$552,988. A deductive change order of about \$28,000 was issued, bringing the final project cost to \$524,553.79.

Staff is recommending that the Commission approve filing a notice of completion with Riverside County upon receiving the following four required items; 1) Contractor has delivered all documents required by the contract documents, 2) Notice from the Architect accepting the work, 3) Receipt of final application payment from the Contractor, and 4) Notice from the Construction Manager recommending final payment. There was no discussion.

MOVED, to authorize the General Manager to accept the Bridgerock Construction Inc., work on the Lobby Security Improvements Project as complete and direct staff to file a Notice of Completion with the Riverside County Clerk upon the following:

1. Contractor has delivered all documents required by the Contract Documents,
2. Notice from the Architect accepting the work,
3. Receipt of Final Application for Payment from the Contractor, and
4. Notice from the Construction Manager recommending final payment.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Hall/Botello
Ayes:	Bilodeau, Botello, Gardner, Hall, Paule
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	None
Absent:	None

7. INFORMATIONAL REPORTS

Recommendation: Receive for Information.

A. CASH TRANSACTIONS REPORT – AUGUST 2025

Presenter: Karen Williams

B. INTER-FUND BORROWING – AUGUST 2025 (CM#2025.78)

Presenter: Karen Williams

C. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS/FINANCIAL REPORTING – AUGUST 2025 (CM#2025.79)

Presenter: Karen Williams

D. PROJECT AGREEMENT 25 – OWOW FUND – FINANCIAL REPORT, JULY 2025

Presenter: Karen Williams

E. PROJECT AGREEMENT 26 – ROUNDTABLE FUND – FINANCIAL REPORT, JULY 2025

Presenter: Karen Williams

F. PLANNING DEPARTMENT QUARTERLY REPORT: JULY – OCTOBER 2025

Presenter: Ian Achimore

G. STATE LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Presenter: Karen Williams

H. GENERAL MANAGER REPORT

Karen Williams introduced SAWPA's new Water Resources and Planning intern, Olivia Burgess. Ms. Burgess noted that she is in her fourth year at Cal Poly Pomona, majoring in Environmental Studies and minoring in Urban and Regional Planning. Ms. Burgess recently returned from studying abroad in Costa Rica, where she gained a deeper appreciation for water sustainability and is looking forward to working with the team.

Ms. Williams also announced the launch of a new Employee of the Year program to recognize outstanding achievements and contributions from SAWPA staff. Nominations for the award opened on October 1st. In addition, staff have partnered with CV Strategies to produce a video for SAWPA's 50th anniversary. At the next meeting, scheduled for November 4th, we'll be setting up interviews for the video. If the Commission is interested in being interviewed, staff will be providing talking points and details. Ms. Williams requested all Commissioners to attend the November 4th meeting to capture a group photo for the anniversary book and then conduct the interviews.

I. CHAIR'S COMMENTS/REPORT

Chair Gardner expressed appreciation for the lobby improvements, noting that it looks great and particularly values the additional security for employees. He highlighted how this enhancement helps protect against various potential issues, from unexpected visitors to safety concerns, and emphasized that it positions the organization better in terms of safety and comfort for both employees and visitors.

Additionally, Chair Gardner inquired if there is an estimated timeline for filling the Water Resources Planning Director position. Ms. Williams noted that second interviews are scheduled for tomorrow, and hopefully, following those interviews, a candidate will be selected.

J. COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

There were no Commissioners' comments received.

K. COMMISSIONERS' REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

There were no requests for future agenda items.

The Commission confirmed that there were no updates regarding Closed Session Agenda Item 8.A, Threat to Public Services or Facilities, and therefore determined that a closed session was not necessary.

8. CLOSED SESSION

A. THREAT TO PUBLIC SERVICES OR FACILITIES

Consultation with Thomas S. Bunn, Commission General Counsel

9. CLOSED SESSION REPORT

There was no Closed Session.

10. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for review, Chair Gardner adjourned the meeting at 10:00 a.m.

Approved at a Regular Meeting of the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority Commission on Tuesday, November 4, 2025.

Signed by:

Mike Gardner

SA140ABF4DAF4C0...

Mike Gardner, Chair

Attest:

Signed by:

Sara Villa

F81501326E9F448...

Sara Villa, Clerk of the Board