

A Bad Ordinance Meets Its End

by Andrew Christie, Chapter Director



When the former majority on the SLO County Board of Supervisors ended its reign after last year's election, the ground was littered with their terrible decisions, many of them clearly about nothing else but their wish to dispense favors to their donors and remain in power.

But nothing else really spoke to the old Board's mindset of willful environmental ignorance like the Paso Basin Land Use Management Area Planting Ordinance, which the conservative majority sought to inflict on the critically overdrafted Paso Robles Groundwater Basin.

As reported in [the Aug. 25 New Times](#), noting the key take-away from the project's Environmental Impact Report, "Over the next 22 years, the EIR estimates it would spawn 250 new, 20-acre vineyards, which would add close to 10,000 acre feet per year of demand on the basin—almost double what the basin's overdraft is already estimated at now."

Photo of vineyards near Paso Robles / Library of Congress

Five months later, in the formal prose of the SLO County Planning Department:

"On February 7, 2023, the County Board of Supervisors (Board) rescinded the Paso Basin Land Use Management Area Planting Ordinance and re-enacted and extended until January 1, 2028, the Agricultural Offset Requirements. The Board also decertified the Ordinance Final Program Environmental Impact Report and associated CEQA Findings, directed staff to not process applications for the Planting Ordinance, and directed staff to bring back at an appropriate time for Board discussion opportunities to amend the Agricultural Offset Requirements to account for off-site offsets and voluntary fallowing related to the Groundwater Sustainability Agency Multi-Benefit Irrigated Lands Repurposing (MILR) program. The enacted ordinance and resolutions are available [on the project website](#)."

In less formal language: The new majority on the County Board of Supervisors is cleaning up the legacy left by the previous Board majority, which was basically an insult to democracy.

Last November, when the proposed Planting Ordinance was making its way toward the previous Board of Supervisors with a recommendation from the Planning Commission that it be rejected outright, I [opined in New Times](#): “Whether they ignore their planning commissioners and put their ordinance on the books so a future board can kill it, or they bow to reality, letting it die quickly and simply extending the current 1:1 water use offset program until the groundwater sustainability plan is in place, this board's legacy is secure. This is the board that slavishly serves the interests of the off-road vehicle lobby at the Oceano Dunes, gave a platform to delusional charges of voter fraud in the 2020 election, withheld the benefits of community choice energy from county residents, eliminated the position of climate action program manager (because problem solved), tried to violate the state law governing the creation of subdivisions (before the Sierra Club put a stop to that), lobbied Sacramento with a shopping list of voter suppression measures, drove the nail in the coffin of affordable housing by repealing the county's inclusionary housing ordinance, and gerrymandered the supervisorial districts in an attempt to secure permanent minority rule.”

Sure enough, the old Board went ahead and put the ordinance on the books, leaving it to the new Board to make that bow to reality, kill the ordinance, and extend the 1:1 water use offset program, requiring that one acre of crops be fallowed for every new acre put into irrigation. Also on the new Board's to-do list are revisiting that gerrymander, plus the sky-high political contribution limits put in place by their predecessors for the convenience of big money donors, and finally giving the County the chance to join all its cities in our regional community choice energy program.

But, appropriately, they started with the Paso planting ordinance, the one action that perfectly sums up the legacy of Supervisors Compton, Arnold, and Peschong. Its revocation leaves behind a damp residue and a warning of what happens when politicians act on the impulse to strongarm political ideology over environmental reality. Let that be its epitaph.

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

WHO: San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors

WHEN: **Tuesday, February 7, 2023**, at 9:00 a.m. All items are advertised for 9:00 a.m. To find out placement of this item on the Board of Supervisors Agenda, go to the County's website at www.slocounty.ca.gov on the Wednesday before the scheduled hearing date.

WHAT: Hearing to consider a request by the **County of San Luis Obispo** to rescind Ordinance No. 3483, decertify the associated Final Program Environmental Impact Report (FPEIR), and to restore the regulatory framework of Sections 8.40.030, 8.40.040 of Title 8 and 22.06.030, 22.06.040, 22.30.200, 22.30.204, 22.30.310, 22.62.030, and 22.80.030 of Title 22 of the County Code and the Goals and Policies in the Agriculture and Conservation and Open Space Elements of the County General Plan related to new or expanded irrigated crop production within the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin.

County File Number: LRP2021-00001 **Assessor Parcel Number:** Various
Supervisorial District: 1, 2, & 4 **Date Authorized:** January 24, 2023

WHERE: The hearing will be held in the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors Chambers, 1055 Monterey St., Room #D170, County Government Center, San Luis Obispo, CA. The Board of Supervisors Chambers are located on the corner of Santa Rosa and Monterey Streets. At the hearing all interested persons may express their views for or against, or to change the proposal.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: You may contact **Kylie Hensley, Planner**, at khensley@co.slo.ca.us or in the San Luis Obispo County Department of Planning and Building, 976 Osos Street, Room 200, San Luis Obispo, California 93408, (805) 781-5600. The staff report will be available for review the Wednesday before the scheduled hearing date on the County's website at www.slocounty.ca.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION: Also to be considered is a determination that the action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) and Sections 15307 and 15308 (actions to protect natural resources and the environment).

COASTAL APPEALABLE: No

****if you challenge this matter in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this public notice or in written correspondence delivered to the appropriate authority at or before the public hearing****

DATED: January 25, 2023

WADE HORTON, EX-OFFICIO CLERK OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

By Annette Ramirez
Deputy Clerk

It's Outta Here!

The County announced that environmental sanity would return on February 7.