

Cambria's Sustainable Water Facility 101 – Part 3
At the Crossroads: The Regular Coastal Development Permit as of June 2018

SUMMARY

- The *emergency* permit issued by San Luis Obispo County in 2014 authorized the CCSD to construct the Emergency Water Supply project and begin operating it all within six months. However, the emergency permit also **expressly required** the CCSD to apply for and pursue a *regular* coastal development permit (CDP).

- Had the CCSD not applied for and pursued the regular permit, or should the District fail to obtain a regular permit, the CCSD may not be able to use the EWS even during emergency conditions.

- A regular CDP will greatly benefit Cambria by giving the CCSD flexibility to use the SWF. Specifically, it would authorize the CCSD to: 1) use the SWF to avoid imposing drastic conservation measures during future extended droughts; 2) recharge the San Simeon Creek aquifer during dry summer months, protecting the aquifer from subsidence and seawater intrusion; 3) indirectly protect the Santa Rosa Creek aquifer by reducing Cambria's dependence on it; and 4) protect the vitality of habitats that depend on both aquifers and the San Simeon Creek Lagoon.

- A regular CDP would also improve relationships and cooperation with regulatory agencies and give the CCSD's more opportunities to garner additional grants for the SWF and SWF-related projects.

Introduction

In the first two essays of our series, we discussed the history leading up to the construction of the Emergency Water Supply project, since renamed the Sustainable Water Facility (SWF), as well as the purpose, design, operation and capacity of the SWF. In this third essay, we dive deeply into the CCSD's pending application for a *regular* coastal development permit (CDP) for the SWF.¹ We explain why the pursuit of a regular CDP was necessary and why the SWF will substantially benefit Cambria and the environment.

As a Condition of the EWS Permit, SLO County Required the CCSD to Apply for a Regular Coastal Development Permit

The EWS was constructed in response to the drastic emergency drought conditions that we Cambrians experienced for several years leading up to the CCSD's decision in early 2014 to proceed with the project. We now have the EWS, it functions well and, operating under the *emergency* permit, goes part way to alleviate the severe effects of a drought. So, some ask, why do we need a *regular* permit?

The simple answer is that the 2014 emergency development permit issued by San Luis Obispo County contains an express condition requiring the CCSD to apply for and pursue a regular coastal development permit. That means that even though the CCSD was able to design, construct and fully test the EWS and place it in operation, it must also go back and seek a regular CDP that requires full review by San Luis Obispo County, the Coastal Commission and all other interested agencies as if it were a new project. If the CCSD had failed to apply for or pursue its application for a regular permit, the project could not be used beyond Stage 3 emergencies and, perhaps, eventually could not be used at all.

A Regular Development Permit Will Substantially Benefit Cambria and the Environment

Beyond the fact that the CCSD was required by the County to pursue a regular permit, such a permit will benefit Cambria in several important ways.

Currently, the EWS may *only* be operated when the CCSD declares a Stage 3 water emergency, which means the water plant can only be used when the CCSD has also imposed drastic mandatory water conservation measures. Those of us who lived through the recent Stage 3 emergency recall that Cambrians were required to cut back on water consumption by nearly half. We consistently delayed washing dishes, laundry, bathing and even flushing toilets. We turned off all landscape irrigation systems. Washing our own motor vehicles was forbidden. Some of us resorted to collecting water in buckets from our baths and showers to water our plants.

On the other hand, under a reasonable and flexible regular coastal development permit the CCSD may use the Sustainable Water Facility to *avoid* Stage 3 emergencies and, thus, *avoid* the inconvenient, unhealthful and unsafe conservation measures required under Stage 3 emergencies. So, while conservation will always be a part of Cambria's long-term water plan, allowing the CCSD to use the SWF under a flexible regular permit will sustain the community during dry periods without imposing mandatory drastic conservation measures.

Using the SWF to avoid impacts from impending droughts protects not only the comfort but the health and safety of every Cambrian. Requiring our fellow townspeople to

engage the drastic conservation measures described above is plain unhealthy. Further, allowing our residents to use water to maintain healthy landscaping as a buffer around their homes is a preferred way to prevent the spread of wildfires, a constant threat during dry summer months. In short, a flexible regular coastal development permit for the SWF would allow the CCSD much greater ability to plan for the town's water future. After all, Cambrians are paying for the SWF and, within reason, CCSD should be able to use the SWF to benefit all residents and businesses.

Furthermore, permitting the facility as permanent and sustainable, rather than temporary or emergency, improves the CCSD's relationships with agencies with an interest in the SWF. Likewise, it improves CCSD's chances of obtaining future grants for the SWF and SWF-related projects.

Beyond using the SWF in response to impending severe and extended droughts, the SWF is also an important tool even during normal summers. Specifically, operating the SWF to recharge the San Simeon Creek aquifer during summer months will directly sustain that aquifer and indirectly sustain the Santa Rosa Creek aquifer by reducing the town's reliance on Santa Rosa Creek. Protecting these aquifers preserves Cambria's natural water supplies and protects the habitats that depend on these aquifers.

Finally, when operating, the SWF returns up to 100 gallons of fresh water per minute directly into the San Simeon Creek Lagoon which will help to sustain lagoon habitats during dry summer months.

Conclusion

Unquestionably, it is essential that the CCSD obtain a regular coastal development permit so that the District has flexibility to use the SWF to avoid the dire consequences of extended droughts, supplement Cambria's supply of potable water during dry summer months and sustain the town's two natural aquifers and natural habitats that depend on those aquifers. The next essay in our series, the fourth and final edition, is entitled *Call to the Cause: How We Can All Act Now to Secure the Regular Permit*. As the title indicates, this final essay outlines important ways that each of us can do our part to assure that the CCSD obtain a reasonable and flexible regular coastal development permit.

Cambrians for Water Steering Committee