The Calaveras Experience

The Water and Wastewater Committee

John Benoît, Calaveras LAFCo Executive Officer
and Bob Dean, Board Member, Calaveras County Water District

April 24, 2012
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In the beginning.....

- As one can imagine Calaveras County has had a long history of mistrust when it comes to water.
- Also over the years there has been ever changing state and federal regulations affecting water and wastewater services.
- In 1996, the Calaveras County Water Master Plan recommended the formation of a County Water Interest Group, which met for a brief period of time.
- Mistrust was evident when the water and wastewater municipal service reviews were prepared in 2003 and 2005. However, there remained a desire for collaboration regarding water and wastewater matters.
- The 2003 and 2005 service reviews therefore recommended that a Technical Advisory Committee be formed.

In the Beginning Continued.....

- Among the topics to be explored was the long-term interconnection of water systems to increase reliability and LAFCo recommended the Calaveras County Water District (The largest water agency in Calaveras County) in association with five other water purveyors investigate the establishment of a Technical Advisory Committee and report back to LAFCo in one year.
- As time passed. No report was ever submitted albeit discussed.
- Meanwhile in January 2005, the wastewater municipal service review was adopted with a similar recommendation for collaboration. Since CCWD is also a wastewater provider and the largest in the County it was recommended that "CCWD, in association with six other public agencies......investigate the establishment of a Technical Advisory Committee and report back to LAFCo within one year..."
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The Water/Wastewater Forum

- Time passed since the Water and Wastewater reviews were prepared and members of the LAFCo Commission grew frustrated.
- CCWD agreed to sponsor a "Water/Wastewater Forum" in January 2007 having a goal to identify opportunities for collaboration to foster mutual benefits.

What was the forum:

- Venue for open dialogue:
  - Share common interests
  - Information/data exchange
  - Understand issues/challenges of other districts
  - Platform to help integrate Land Use planning with Service Provider planning
  - Look for mutual benefits through collaboration

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What would be the forum's limitations??????

There were none:
- Defined by the participants
- Broad or narrow as desired
- Long-term/short-term
- Issue specific or multiple resource driven
- Formal or informal

Goals and Participants

- Goals were basic .... “Encourage Collaboration and Develop Mutual Benefits”
- Participants:
  - Water purveyors
  - Wastewater service providers
  - County board of supervisors
  - County - Community Development
  - LAFCo
  - Private sector (business interests)
  - Interested stakeholders/public
  - Public trust resource agencies

Is there a need for this in Calaveras County??

Key Questions:
- Are there anticipated key public service, demographic, and socioeconomic issues facing the County over the next 20-30 years?
- Is there a genuine need for improved collaborative planning between service providers, the County, and stakeholders?
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Issues:
• Available Resources and Infrastructure
  Adequate Water Supply, Delivery Infrastructure and wastewater disposal capability
• Demographic Issues
  Growth rates, anticipated annexations, service availability
• Natural Resource Issues
  Maintenance of water quality, land use, resource protection and enhancement
• Socio-Economic Issues
  Water Marketing, Groundwater banking, recreation

Do we really want growth or not????

Potential Benefits:
• Planning decisions can be improved within all entities
  - "You know what others are planning"
  - Resources, Infrastructure, and timing
  - Enhanced General Plan – Public Services/Utilities Elements
    (Calaveras County is embarking upon a new general plan and the City of Angels is in the middle of
    the general plan preparation)
• Improved timing for approvals
• Cost sharing
• County-wide benefits

Planning would be the focus:
• The notion was the best possible planning decisions would result from collaboration
  — long-range infrastructure planning
  — long-range water supply planning
  — coordinated with General Plan projections
  — provide LAFCO with appropriate baseline information
  — recognize spatial and temporal differences in service provider capabilities

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What could we have accomplished?

- Regional Agreements being broadly supported
- Individual purveyor agreements
- Established *quid pro quo*
- Implemented cost sharing mechanisms
- Introduced – "Adaptive Management"

LOFTY GOALS...Could we do this in Calaveras County?

- Yes.... We would need to....... 
  Recognize the autonomy of individual districts, agencies, and parties
  Define the objectives
  Define the boundaries of action
  Set a reasonable timeframe
  Obtain support of the Board(s)
- And we would also need to.....
  Develop a governance structure, establish cost sharing, establish a timeline, identify milestones and engage in public or increased outreach to the community.

Well.....What happened??

- The Districts and those present at the Water Forum said "YES" to collaboration.
- A member of the public questioned whether LACo or County Officials would put too much emphasis on what water district officials would say and provide?
- LACo established a water/wastewater advisory committee consisting of General Managers and members of water/wastewater district Boards of Directors... and members of the public at large.
- A small JPA called the Utica Power Authority, a power and water (domestic and irrigation provider also wanted to be involved)
- Wastewater and water operators became involved to resolve technical operational issues
- County was preparing a new General Plan (and still is) and CCWD funded a water element.
- LACo initiated its Special District Training Institute so districts could attend and receive free training on governance and administrative issues.

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What went wrong?

- It became unclear what the purpose of the forum was because of the diverse participation; District Managers, engineers, members of the Board of Directors, treatment operators and the public having special interests.
- Meanwhile, CCWD paid the costs of preparing a water element to be included in the County General Plan which included sections objected to by many, even before sections were actually written (including several on the water committee).
- CCWD and LACo sponsored a SB 1331, which would have given CCWD a special seat on the LACODSC. Great objections were raised by committee participants and the bill died.
- The Utility Authority sued CCWD over fostering Water Rights Issues.
- One of the public participants on the committee called the Regional Water Quality Control Board and tried to convince them not to fund the first stimulus grant in California for 12 million dollars for an essential upgrade the San Andreas Sanitary District WWTP.
- It became apparent a new Water and Wastewater MSA was needed to identify among other things the fiscal capability of the service providers. The final draft of this MSA was released last month.
- Mistrust and paranoia about CCWD taking over the smaller districts.

Lessons Learned.....

- Establish ground rules for committee participation i.e. mutual respect for one another???
- Make sure the goal of the committee is focused on the objective(s) you wish to accomplish within a given timeframe.
- Work to ensure committee members are participating to resolve issues of common concern
- Resolve who will be committee participants from the onset.
- Strive to develop trust among committee members.
- Have an independent facilitator without a dog in the fight.

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