

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE OF
VISTA IRRIGATION DISTRICT

February 3, 2025

A meeting of the Public Affairs Committee of Vista Irrigation District was held on Monday, February 3, 2025, at the offices of the District, 1391 Engineer Street, Vista, California.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Kuchinsky called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Directors present: Kuchinsky and MacKenzie.

Directors absent: None.

Staff present: Brett Hodgkiss, General Manager; Ramae Ogilvie, Secretary of the Board; Shallako Goodrick, Director of Administration; and Brent Reyes, Management Analyst.

Other attendees: Gina DePinto of Raftelis Financial Consultants, Inc. (Raftelis)

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved as presented.

4. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

No public comments were presented on items not appearing on the agenda.

5. COMPREHENSIVE COST OF SERVICE/WATER RATE STUDY PUBLIC OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

See staff report attached hereto.

Gina DePinto from Raftelis presented an overview of the public outreach activities that could be used to engage ratepayers during the comprehensive cost of service/water rate study process via a slideshow presentation, attached hereto as Exhibit A. She discussed different types community meetings (Town Hall and Open House), various multimedia materials and messaging, the Proposition 218 public hearing and objection process noticing and a tentative activity schedule. Ms. DePinto reviewed additional outreach opportunities that could be considered for further public engagement including a customer email blast (Eblast), stakeholder interviews and surveys, and citizen advisory committees. Staff advised the Committee that they would investigate creating recorded webinars/video presentations in-house related to the rate setting process that could be posted on a dedicated water rate webpage and accessed at any time.

The Committee discussed the information and timeline presented; they supported the District conducting two hybrid town hall/open house community meetings, one before the public hearing notice is mailed and one after. The Committee also concurred with the recommendation to utilize a designated water rate information web page on the District's website, direct mail postcard, a customer Eblast, District

newsletter, press releases, on-hold telephone message, bill messaging and on demand webinars to inform and educate the public about the rate setting process.

The Committee recommended advising the Board of the suggested outreach activities and timeline.

6. COMMENTS BY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

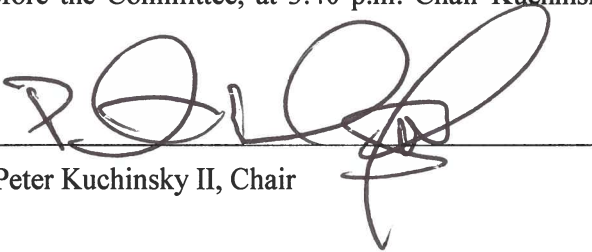
Chair Kuchinsky thanked Ms. DePinto and staff for their efforts and requested that staff keep the Board updated on the District's public outreach activities related to the rate setting process.

7. COMMENTS BY GENERAL MANAGER

Mr. Hodgkiss thanked the Committee for their time reviewing and providing feedback on suggested public outreach approaches.

8. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Committee, at 3:40 p.m. Chair Kuchinsky adjourned the meeting.



Peter Kuchinsky II, Chair

ATTEST:



Ranae Ogilvie, Secretary
Board of Directors
VISTA IRRIGATION DISTRICT



**PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
STAFF REPORT**

Meeting Date: February 3, 2025
Prepared By: Shallako Goodrick
Approved By: Brett Hodgkiss

SUBJECT: COMPREHENSIVE COST OF SERVICE/WATER RATE STUDY PUBLIC OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

RECOMMENDATION: Discuss public outreach activities to be used to engage ratepayers during the comprehensive cost of service/water rate study process.

PRIOR BOARD ACTION: At its January 15, 2025 meeting, the Board requested that the Public Affairs Committee schedule a meeting to discuss the various public outreach activities to use to educate and inform ratepayers about the comprehensive cost of service/water rate study (study), including why it is being prepared.

FISCAL IMPACT: The agreement with Raftelis Financial Consultants, Inc. (Raftelis) for the study includes \$27,605 for public outreach-related activities outlined in Raftelis's proposal (attached); public outreach activities outside those described in the proposal will be at an additional cost.

SUMMARY: During the January 15, 2025 Board meeting, Gina DePinto from Raftelis provided an overview of various public outreach activities that can be deployed to engage ratepayers during the study process. After hearing from Ms. DePinto and briefly discussing a number of potential outreach methods, the Board requested that the Public Affairs Committee schedule a meeting with staff and Ms. DePinto to discuss various public outreach methods that the District could use to educate and inform ratepayers about the study and why it is being prepared. Topics to be covered include, but are not limited to, the development of an outreach plan, communication and education methods (e.g. mailings, news releases, short educational videos, infographics and open houses/town halls, etc.) and study outreach budget/costs.

ATTACHMENT: Excerpt from Raftelis Proposal – Public Relations

Task 5: Public Relations

Community engagement and strategic communications planning increases community acceptance, enhances credibility with stakeholders and policymakers, and builds awareness of the value of the service and need for utility investments. Effective public participation acknowledges the desire for humans to participate in decisions that affect them; seeking public input will help drive thoughtful decision-making. Communicating early and often builds transparency and trust, as opposed to being told late in the process, after decisions are made, or when ratepayers receive a legally required rate adjustment notice in the mail.

Raftelis' in-house Strategic Communications team has assisted utility agencies and municipalities across California and the U.S., including some of the largest and most complex local governments in the nation. In the past year alone, the Raftelis communications team worked on strategic communications projects for more than 40 public sector clients. Most of our team members are accredited in public relations and hold certificates in public participation. We are often called upon to facilitate public and community meetings, Board and Council workshops, and advisory committees. We can support the District's rate study with guidance, structure, strategies, tools, and tactics to communicate clearly and broadly to your customers and key stakeholders.

Task 5.1 Community Engagement Events (Town Hall, Open House, or Workshop format)

To accommodate a proactive and transparent process and gather input from customers, Raftelis will help coordinate and present at two community engagement events ahead of the public hearing (Town Hall, Open House, or workshop format) to inform the public about the need to adjust rates. These would be separate from publicly noticed Board meetings, workshops, and hearings. We can support Town Halls, however, we recommend an Open House format that creates convenient, one-on-one conversations with customers in a low-conflict setting, ensuring that customers can get their questions answered and that District staff can benefit from community feedback. This process can be highly collaborative and iterative; the feedback we receive from key stakeholders can help guide the direction of the study and inform the methodologies and options ultimately selected for the final rate proposal. The presentation will be reviewed by our communications staff who are experts at developing clear, compelling, and consistent messages that build awareness and support from customers.

Task 5.2 Development of Multimedia Outreach Materials

Key messages developed as part of the strategic communications framework come to life when woven together into powerful communications pieces by Raftelis' strategic communicators and professional graphic designers. Visual representation of proposed changes in an easy-to-understand and accessible format significantly improves customer understanding of rate structure changes that may impact customer bills. Raftelis will develop a suite of communications pieces to assist with communicating rate and rate structure changes in print, online, or in person. This task can include the development of a mix of infographics, fact sheets, bill stuffers, presentation slide decks, FAQs, talking points, website copy, social media content, explainer videos, news releases, etc., all in one or more languages. As priced, deliverables include FAQs, a bill stuffer, website and newsletter content, press releases, social media content, a 2-minute custom animated explainer video, direct mail postcard, and design of infographics.

Task 5.3 Proposition 218 Public Notice Preparation

While requirements of the Proposition 218 Public Hearing Notice are easy to satisfy, too many utilities and municipalities miss the opportunity to educate and inform the public of the need for rate increases that support these essential services. Over the years, Raftelis has designed countless Proposition 218 notices that go beyond the minimum dictated by statute to deliver visually appealing pieces that customers want to read. We can draft the content and match the District's established brand guidelines

to design custom graphics that support clear, positive messaging in the Notice. Once these arrive in mailboxes, customers will not only be properly notified, but will understand the District's needs and be more likely to support rate adjustments.

PLANNED MEETINGS:

- Two in-person community engagement events (Town Hall, Open House, or Workshop format)

DELIVERABLES:

- Draft community event presentation in Microsoft PowerPoint with two rounds of edits
- Community event promotional materials including digital, print, and social media event notices and content
- Community event logistical coordination and on-site facilitation
- Design and development of FAQs, a bill stuffer, website and newsletter content, two press releases, social media content, a 2-minute custom animated explainer video, direct mail postcard, and infographics
- Draft Proposition 218 notice content for the District's legal review and approval
- Design and layout of the Proposition 218 notice with two rounds of revisions and final press-ready PDF in English. As proposed, Raftelis will provide the Notice in other languages with certified translation provided by the District. Raftelis can also recommend certified language translation services.