

# **PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT**

## **Sphere of Influence Study**

**Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District**

**Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission**

October 2025

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## ACRONYMS

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AFY – acre feet/year

APN – Assessor’s Parcel Number

CEQA – California Environmental Quality Act

CIP – Capital Improvement Plan

CKH – Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000

ESD – Equivalent Single-Family Dwelling

FY - Fiscal Year

GPCD – Gallons Per Capita per Day

GPM – Gallons per Minute

LAFCO - Local Agency Formation Commission

MG – Million Gallons

MGD – Million Gallons Per Day

MSR – Municipal Service Review

OSSA - Out of Area Service Agreements

SCADA - Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition System

Sonoma Water – Sonoma County Water Agency

SOI – Sphere of Influence

SWRCB - State Water Resources Control Board

## 1: INTRODUCTION

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The fundamental role of a Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) is to implement the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg (CKH) Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 (Government Code Section 56000, et seq.), providing for the logical, efficient, and most appropriate formation of local municipalities, service areas, and special districts. The CKH requires all LAFCOs, including Sonoma LAFCO, to conduct a Municipal Service Review (MSR) for local agencies every five years or when it is determined that conducting one is necessary. (Sonoma LAFCO uses the second criterion.)

According to CKH the Commission must make determinations for each of the following seven elements in a Municipal Service Review:

**Growth and Population Projections for the Affected Area.** This section reviews projected growth within the existing service boundaries of the district and analyzes the district's plans to accommodate future growth.

**The location and characteristics of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence.** A disadvantaged community is defined as one with a median household income of 80 percent or less of the statewide median income.

**Present and Planned Capacity of Public Facilities and Adequacy of Public Services Including Infrastructure Needs or Deficiencies.** This section discusses the services provided including the quality and the ability of the district to provide those services. It will include a discussion of capital improvement projects currently underway, and projects planned for the future where applicable.

**Financial Ability of Agencies to Provide Services.** This section reviews the district's fiscal data and rate structure to determine viability and ability to meet service demands. It also addresses funding for capital improvement projects.

**Status of and Opportunities for Shared Facilities.** This section examines efficiencies of service delivery that could include sharing facilities with other agencies to reduce costs by avoiding duplication.

**Accountability for Community Service Needs, including Government Structure and Operational Efficiencies.** This section examines the district's current government structure and considers the overall managerial practices. It also examines how well each district makes its processes transparent to the public and invites and encourages public participation.

**Matters Related to Effective or Efficient Service Delivery, as Required by Commission Policy.** This section includes a discussion of any Sonoma LAFCO policies that may affect the ability to provide efficient services.

### **1.1 – Purpose of the Municipal Service Review**

An MSR provides Sonoma LAFCO with an informational document that analyses current service provision by a local agency. It is also used to inform any decisions to modify an agency's sphere of influence (SOI) - a boundary indicating where the agency might extend services within the near future. Sonoma LAFCO generally considers a five- to ten-year planning horizon for sphere of influence amendments.

While conducting a Municipal Service Review in tandem with a Sphere of Influence Study is preferred, many LAFCOs consider minor sphere amendments without conducting an MSR.

For the Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District, Sonoma LAFCO staff have prepared this Sphere of Influence Study without an attending Municipal Service Review, because a sphere amendment is proposing involving only two parcels of land intended for development as a fire station for the Sonoma Valley Fire District.

### **1.2 – Sphere of Influence**

There are five determinations which must be made to update or amend the SOI. The Commission must consider:

**Present and planned land uses in the area, including agricultural and open space lands** - This consists of a review of current and planned land uses based on planning documents to include agricultural and open space lands.

**Present and probable need for public facilities and services** - This includes a review of the services available in the area and the need for additional services.

**Present capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services provided by the agency** - This section includes an analysis of the capacity of public facilities and the adequacy of public services that the District provides or is authorized to provide.

**Social or economic communities of interest** - This section discusses the existence of any social or economic communities of interest in the area if the Commission determines that they are relevant to the District. These are areas that may be affected by services provided by the District or may be receiving services in the future.

**Present and probable need for services to disadvantaged communities** - Beginning July 1, 2012, the commission must also consider services to disadvantaged communities which are defined as inhabited areas within the SOI whose median household income is less than or equal to 80 percent of the statewide median income. CKH defines inhabited as 12 or more registered voters.

### **1.3 – California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

Actions taken by LAFCO require review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Municipal service reviews are exempt under Class 6, since the MSR is a data collection study. CEQA

Guidelines Section 15306 states that “Class 6 consists of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.”

In contrast a sphere of influence is subject to CEQA. In many cases, LAFCO is the responsible agency, but when LAFCO initiates the project, it is the lead agency. For example, LAFCO is often the lead agency for the adoption of a sphere of influence or an update to a sphere of influence.

#### **1.4 – District Profile**

The Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District (SVCSD) encompasses a significant portion of the area known as “The Valley of the Moon”. SVCSD was formed in 1953.

The District serves territory comprising 4500 acres, 10,500 parcels and 17,900 ESDs. (An ESD is a unit of demand based on an Equivalent Single-family Dwelling.)

SVCSD provides sanitation service to residents living in unincorporated portions of the Sonoma Valley, including the communities of Trinity Oaks, Glen Ellen, Boyes Hot Springs, Fetters Hot Springs, Agua Caliente, El Verano, and Temelec, and residents living in the incorporated City of Sonoma.

##### *Facilities*

The District manages a collection system (the network of pipes that collect wastewater from residences and commercial properties) and a treatment plant that processes the waste. The treatment plant is located in the southern portion of the Sonoma Valley on Eighth Street East, just south of the Sonoma Valley Business Park area.

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board issued an order in 2015 directing the District to make a series of improvements to the collection system to minimize what are called wet-weather inflows. In wet weather, rainwater can migrate into the collection system, potentially exceeding the capacity of the treatment plant, which results in releases of untreated water into local waterways (for SVCSD that includes the San Pablo Bay via the Schell Slough).

The District is embarking on the collection system improvements and has indicated to ratepayers that rate increases exceeding the rate of inflation will be required to fund the capital improvements.

The District also manages a treated wastewater distribution system. This system delivers treated water for agricultural, and reclamation uses during the dry season.

##### *Governance*

SVCSD is governed by a three-member board consisting of the Mayor of Sonoma, the County’s First District Supervisor, and the Chair of the Board of Supervisors.

##### *Finances*

The District operates on an annual budget of just over \$20 million; the majority of revenue comes from District ratepayers, supplemented by grant funding for some portions of capital projects.

**Table 1-: Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District Profile**

| <b>General Information</b> |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <i>Agency Type</i>         | County Sanitation District                                   |
| <i>Date Formed</i>         | 1953   |
| <i>Services</i>            | Sanitary sewer   |
| <i>Location</i>            | Unincorporated Sonoma County and the City of Sonoma          |
| <i>Sq. Miles/Acres</i>     | 7 sq.mi./approximately 4500 acres                            |
| <i>Land Uses</i>           | Residential, commercial, light industrial, and institutional |
| <i>Treatment Capacity</i>  |  |
| <i>Daily Dry Weather</i>   | 3.0 million gallons  |
| <b>Financial</b>           | FY 2024/25 \$20.54 million revenue                           |
| <b>Governance</b>          | 3-member Board of Directors                                  |
| <b>Agency Contact</b>      | Billy Dixon, Sonoma Water                                    |

Exhibit 1-: Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District Boundary Map

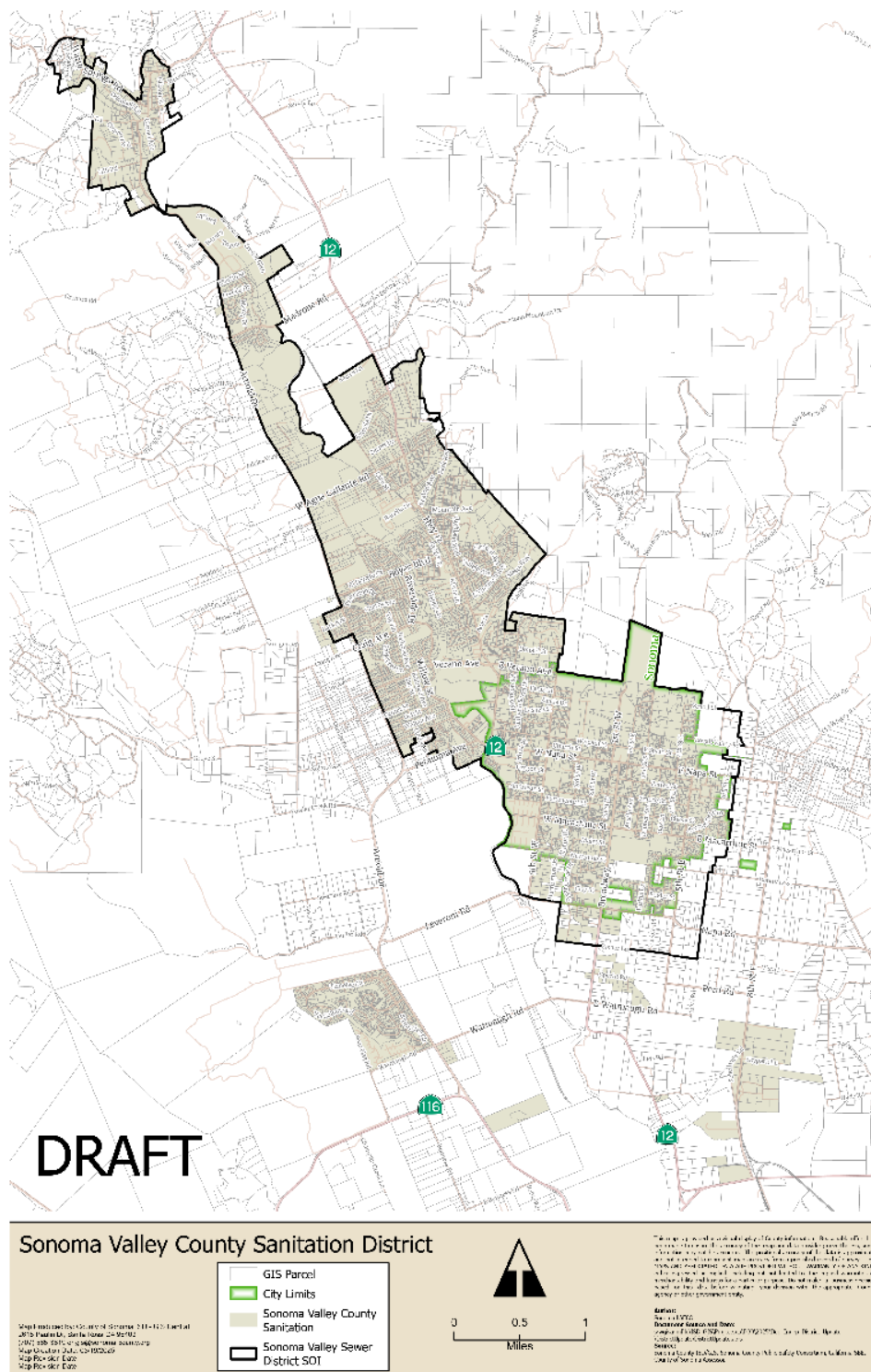


Exhibit 1 shows the district boundaries, including the current Sphere of Influence.



## 2: SPHERE OF INFLUENCE STUDY

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### 2.1 Sphere of Influence Amendments

This study contemplates the addition of only two parcels to the District's Sphere of influence. The parcels are located on Arnold Drive in the unincorporated area of El Verano and are slated for development of a new fire station for the Sonoma Valley Fire District, replacing an existing station a short distance away on Central Avenue.

The parcels are not within the Urban Service Area boundary defined by the County's current General Plan, indicating that the county does not intend the area to be served by municipal service agencies (water and sewer).

However, the parcels are within the existing boundaries of the Valley of the Moon Water District and are thus eligible for water service. Sonoma Valley Fire District is seeking a General Plan Amendment to change the Urban Service Boundary along with its application for a Conditional Use Permit filed with Permit Sonoma.

While the Sonoma Valley Fire District could serve the new facility with an on-site septic system, connection to SVCSD is considered preferable both by Sonoma Valley Fire and Permit Sonoma.

**Table 2:- Sphere of Influence Amendments**

| Address                       | APN              | Land Use          | Acreage |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------|
| 19154 Arnold Drive, El Verano | APN: 052-382-002 | Rural residential | 3.83    |
| 19220 Arnold Drive, El Verano | APN: 052-382-004 | Rural residential | 3.83    |

The following sections propose determinations for the five criteria outlined in the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act that support the proposed amendments to the SVCSD Sphere of Influence.

#### 2.3 - Present and planned land uses in the area, including agricultural and open space lands.

##### Determination

- The properties proposed for inclusion in the District's sphere of influence are zoned for rural residential purposes, with one existing residence on one of the parcels. The Sonoma Valley Fire District has recently purchased the parcels and has secured funding to construct a new fire station on the site, replacing the existing Fire Station #2 on Center Street in the unincorporated community of El Verano.
- Sonoma Fire is in the process of seeking entitlements from Permit Sonoma and is seeking connection to the Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District. There is potential to serve the site with an on-site septic system, but that option is less than optimal.

- **The parcels recommended for inclusion in the District’s Sphere of Influence are not open space lands and are not being used for agricultural production.**

### **Discussion**

The Sonoma Valley Fire District is managing a set of entitlement applications in order to proceed with development of the two parcels as a new fire station, replacing the existing station a short distance away on Central Avenue in El Verano (which is no longer fit for purpose).

Those entitlements include seeking a Sphere of Influence amendment from LAFCO, followed by an annexation application, and seeking a General Plan Amendment concurrent with a Conditional Use Permit from Permit Sonoma.

The two parcels are currently zoned for Rural Residential use, and are not in the County’s Urban Service Area, necessitating a General Plan Amendment.

From LAFCO’s perspective, the parcels are not designated open space and are not, nor have been, under agricultural production.

## **2.4 - Present and probable need for public facilities and services**

### **Determinations**

- **The District is serving current customers adequately and has facilities that are suitable to meet the demands of projected growth.**
- **While the two parcels recommended for inclusion in the District’s sphere of influence in anticipation of annexation could be served by an on-site septic system it would be more appropriately served by the District.**

### **Discussion**

SVCS is serving existing customers adequately though it is under orders to improve the collection system to minimize wet season inflows. The District has adequate treatment plant capacity for existing users and anticipated growth.

Two large potential developments may require significant collection system upgrades: regularly referred to as the Hanna Boys Center project and the redevelopment of the Sonoma Developmental Center in Eldridge south of Glen Ellen.

The Hanna Boys Center proposal has been formally withdrawn at this time. The Sonoma Developmental Center site, which was connected to the District decade ago, may require collection system upgrades depending on the eventual density of redevelopment uses. In either case, developers would be required to fund both local and systemic collection system upgrades based on their impact to the system.

For the Sonoma Valley Fire District sites, Sonoma Valley Fire would similarly be required to pay for any necessary collection system upgrades, though these are expected to be very local in nature (not requiring a trunk line upgrade, for example).

While the two sites recommended for inclusion in the District’s Sphere of Influence could be served by an on-site septic system, that is not the preferred means of sanitation service for development of this type.

## **2.5 - Present capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services provided by the agency.**

### **Determinations**

- **Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District does not have any localized or systemic collection system capacity limitations, has adequate treatment plant capacity and capability for current and projected needs, and is not limited by treated wastewater outflow constraints.**
- **The District is under an order to address the condition of its collection system broadly in order to limit rainwater inflows but has a capital plan and is making investments in the system.**

### **Discussion**

SVCSO has seen very modest growth over the past several decades – averaging under one percent per year. The District has only very rarely expanded its territory, with growth occurring in areas the District already serves largely using existing facilities.

The District did impose a connection moratorium in the northwestern portion of its service area due to deficiencies in collection system infrastructure, but that condition has long since been remedied.

While the District is under order to remedy rainwater inflows, it has a capital plan to address aging collection system infrastructure and is funding and executing that plan.

For the two parcels recommended for inclusion in the District's Sphere of Influence, there are no system deficiencies or capacity shortfalls that would inhibit connection to the District.

## **2.6 - Social or economic communities of interest.**

### **Determination**

- **There are no designated communities of interest proximate to the borders and sphere of influence of the District.**

## **2.7 - Present and probable need for services to disadvantaged communities.**

### **Determination**

- **Independent special districts are exempt from Disadvantaged Unincorporated Community annexation provisions. Additionally, there are no identified Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities proximate to the District's borders or sphere of influence.**