

# SANTA BARBARA COUNTY BOARD AGENDA LETTER



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
105 East Anapamu Street, Room 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

**Agenda Number:**  
**Prepared on:** 2/14/05  
**Department Name:** P&D  
**Department No.:** 053  
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**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Valentin Alexeeff, Director  
Planning & Development

**STAFF CONTACT:** Brian R. Baca, Engineering Geologist  
Planning and Development, 568-2004

**SUBJECT:** Interpretive Guidelines for Land Use Development Policy #4 and CEQA  
Threshold for projects served by bedrock aquifer water wells.

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## Recommendation:

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Adopt Interpretive Guidelines for Land Use Development Policy #4 with regard to the adequacy of water resources derived from bedrock aquifers for proposed discretionary development projects.
2. Adopt a Threshold of Significance for environmental review under CEQA for impacts on water resources for development projects supported by extractions of groundwater from a bedrock aquifer amending the Groundwater Thresholds Manual section of the County of Santa Barbara Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual.
3. Accept the exemption from CEQA for the change in the adopted Threshold of Significance pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines.

## Alignment with Board Strategic Plan:

The recommendation is primarily aligned with Goal No. 1, *An Efficient Government Able to Respond Effectively to the Needs of the Community*, and is required by law or routine business necessity.

## **Executive Summary and Discussion:**

A finding of consistency with Land Use Development Policy #4 (and the Coastal Land Use Plan equivalent, Policy 2-6) is required in order to approve proposed development projects. This policy requires that “adequate public or private services and resources” be available to serve the proposed development. This policy reads as follows:

*Prior to issuance of a development permit, the County shall make the finding, based on information provided by environmental documents, staff analysis, and the applicant, that adequate public or private services and resources (i.e., water, sewer, roads, etc.) are available to serve the proposed development. The applicant shall assume full responsibility for costs incurred in service extensions or improvements that are required as a result of the proposed project. Lack of available public or private services or resources shall be grounds for denial of the project or reduction in the density otherwise indicated in the land use plan.*

In 1987, the Board of Supervisors adopted interpretive guidelines for the implementation of LUDP #4 for “water basins” in which more than 50 percent of extractions are for municipal/industrial (i.e. urban) uses. These guidelines state that new water service “will only be considered ‘adequate’ and ‘available’ if that service or well use would not contribute to an existing or increased state of groundwater overdraft.” This “Safe Yield” or “No Overdraft” standard has been applied by the County in subsequent determinations of water resource adequacy under LUDP #4 for projects supported by bedrock aquifers. Note that “Safe Yield” refers to the average annual recharge to an aquifer from the infiltration of surface water.

The County Groundwater Thresholds Manual (GTM) was published in 1992. This document describes a County-developed analytical method for the estimation of bedrock aquifer Safe Yield and identifies extractions in excess of the Safe Yield value as a significant impact. Thus, environmental review of proposed projects has relied on a Safe Yield or no overdraft standard similar to the 1987 Interpretive Guidelines. The GTM was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1995 as part of an updated Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual.

While the Safe Yield/No Overdraft standard is appropriate for large projects with substantial water demand, application of this standard to projects with minimal water demand located on large parcels in remote rural areas may not be appropriate. In the case of a single family home, the annual water demand (approximately one acre-foot per year) is very small relative to the volume of water in an aquifer or the pumping rate of a water well, even in cases where substantial treatment is required. In most areas of the County, the bedrock aquifers utilized for development have a recognized Safe Yield more than adequate to serve domestic uses. In certain areas, however, it may not be possible to document that a particular bedrock aquifer receives recharge from the surface (i.e. has a Safe Yield). Utilization of such aquifers at the minimal levels required for single homes would not cause substantial effects on the aquifer or water resources in general. There is some risk that low producing wells could run dry in marginal aquifers at some point in the future. In these cases, the minimal domestic water demand would likely be met by drilling a new well, entering into a shared water system with adjoining parcels, or through importation and storage of potable water. The first option, drilling a new well, would generally be a feasible method for re-establishment of a water supply.

Staff is recommending that your Board adopt Interpretive Guidelines that would simplify the policy consistency analysis and environmental review of water resources for low water demand projects on large rural parcels supported by water extractions from a bedrock aquifer. The proposed guidelines would rely upon the established well testing procedures and minimum flow standards set forth in sections 34B-18 and 34B-20 of the County Code for domestic water systems. Adoption of the proposed guidelines would reduce the staff time and applicant cost required for the analysis of some low water demand projects. The proposed language of the interpretive guidelines and the referenced sections of County Code are provided below:

## **Interpretive Guidelines for Bedrock Aquifers and CEQA Threshold:**

### **Interpretive Guidelines for Land Use Policy #4: Bedrock water wells**

**For discretionary development proposals in designated rural areas on parcels of 20 acres in size or more that involve an estimated gross (applied) water demand of 5.0 acre-feet per year or less, including necessary treatment, proposed to be served by a groundwater well that produces from a bedrock aquifer as determined by the County of Santa Barbara, the following standard for adequacy of water resources under this policy shall apply:**

**The applicant shall demonstrate through pump testing and report by a qualified individual consistent with the source testing requirements of Section 34B-20 of the Santa Barbara County Code for domestic water systems that the water well can meet the minimum flow standards specified in Section 34B-18 of the Santa Barbara County Code for domestic water systems. The applicant shall also provide information or design plans that document the feasibility of installing necessary water delivery systems, including those required for fire suppression.**

### **CEQA Threshold for bedrock water wells:**

**For discretionary development proposals in designated rural areas on parcels of 20 acres in size or more that involve an estimated gross (applied) water demand of 5.0 acre-feet per year or less, including necessary treatment, proposed to be served by a groundwater well that produces from a bedrock aquifer as determined by the County of Santa Barbara, withdrawal of 5.0 acre-feet per year or less from a bedrock aquifer is considered to not have the potential for a significant impact on water resources.**

**This determination is based on the following:**

- a. The minimal level of groundwater withdrawal would have only a negligible effect on the general availability or quantity of groundwater resources, or on the discharge of groundwater to the surface.**
- b. The rate of pumpage required to produce 5.0 AFY of water (3.0 gallons per minute) does not have the potential to cause substantial interference with the production of other nearby wells in the same aquifer.**

- c. **Such minor extractions do not have the potential to substantially affect nearby users of other bedrock aquifers as the hydrologic connection between bedrock aquifers is very limited to nonexistent.**
- d. **Supplemental water resources to sustain minimal domestic use can generally be developed on large rural parcels with the installation of an additional well(s).**

Projects that fall outside of the above guidelines (i.e. the parcel is less than 20 acres in size or the water demand exceeds 5.0 AFY) would continue to be reviewed under the current established standards for policy consistency and impacts under CEQA.

## **County Code for Domestic Water Systems**

### **Sec. 34B-18. Minimum domestic water system source yield.**

(a) When modifying or constructing a state small domestic water system which was not in existence on November 12, 1991, the operator/owner shall demonstrate to the enforcing agency that sufficient water is available from the water system's sources and distribution storage facilities to supply a minimum of three gallons per minute for at least twenty-four hours for each service connection served by the system.

(b) For modifications or new construction of state small domestic water systems which were in existence prior to November 12, 1991, the required minimum domestic water source yield shall be based on one of the following: a minimum of three gallons per minute per water connection based on a valid pump test; documented historical water use figures; or the State Waterworks Standards Charts from section 64564 of division 4, chapter 16, article 2, of title 22 of the California Code of Regulations.

(c) Creek and Stream Source. If approved for use by the enforcing agency as described in section 34B-20; subsection (c), a creek or stream source supplying a domestic water system shall be capable of yielding water continuously throughout the year and providing a minimum of three gallons per minute of water to each domestic water connection served. Source capacity is to be determined by the source testing procedures defined in section 34B-20, subsection (c).

(d) Horizontal Well and Spring Source. If approved for use by the enforcing agency as described in section 34B-20, subsection (d), a horizontal well or spring supplying a domestic water system shall be capable of providing on a continuous basis a minimum of one and one-half gallons per minute per domestic water connection, providing all conditions of the yield determination test as described in section 34B-20, subsection (d), are satisfactorily met. If these conditions are not met, then a minimum of three gallons per minute per domestic connection is required. Source capacity is to be determined by the source testing procedure defined in section 34B-20, subsection (d).

(e) Water Well Source. A water well source or combination of well sources supplying a domestic water system shall be capable of providing on a continuous basis a minimum of three gallons per minute of water to each domestic water connection served. The source capacity is to be determined by the source testing procedures set forth in section 34B-20, subsection (e). (Ord. No. 4181, § 2)

**Sec. 34B-20. Source testing for domestic water systems.**

(a) Single-Parcel Domestic Water System Source Yield Testing. The source yield testing for a single-parcel domestic water system shall be performed only by a C-57 California water well contractor, a C-61 California pump contractor's license, a state-registered geologist or engineering geologist. Such person's licenses shall be active and in good standing with the appropriate state licensing or certification board.

(b) Multiple-Parcel and State Small Domestic Water System Source Yield Testing. The source yield testing for a multiple-parcel or state small domestic water system shall be performed by a state-registered geologist or engineering geologist. Such person's license shall be active and in good standing with the appropriate state licensing or certification board.

(c) Creek and Stream Source Testing. This type of source testing for a domestic water system shall require the applicant to establish his legal right to utilize such source in the quantities required and satisfactorily fulfill one of the two following conditions:

(1) Provide documentation of historical use or yield during two consecutive drought years;  
or

(2) Submit a geohydrologic report prepared by a California-registered geologist or engineering geologist certifying that minimum required yields are available on a continuous, long-term basis.

(d) Horizontal Well and Spring Source Testing. This type of source testing for a domestic water system shall be performed by an approved domestic water system source tester as defined in this section, subsections (a) and (b), and shall meet the following two conditions:

(1) The yield determination was made during the months of August through October;

(2) Documentation is submitted of historical use or yield during two drought years or a geohydrological report, prepared by a California-registered geologist or engineering geologist, certifying that minimum required yields are available on a continuous, long-term basis.

(e) Water Well Source Testing. This type of source testing for a domestic water system shall be performed by an approved domestic water system source tester as defined in this section, subsections (a) and (b), and shall meet the following conditions:

(1) Yield test was performed following the proper development of the water well source and any step-drawdown testing;

(2) Minimum yield test pumping rates and periods were as follows:

<b>Minimum Flow Rate</b>	<b>Test Duration (Hours)</b>
3--10 gpm	72 hours
>10--50 gpm	24 hours
>50 gpm	12 hours

(3) Yield test was conducted at a constant flow rate on a continuous, noninterrupted basis for the durations specified in subsection (e)(2) of this section;

(4) The water level in the well remained constant or varied less than one foot during the last four hours of test pumping. If the water level did not remain constant and varied more than one foot in the last four hours of testing, then a California-registered geologist or a certified engineering geologist shall determine long-term drawdown and reliability using accepted engineering well yield formulas and/or the time recovery data;

(5) If two or more domestic water wells are necessary to meet the minimum yield requirements, these wells must be test pumped simultaneously for the test durations specified in subsection (e)(2) of this section;

(6) A test report prepared and signed by an approved source tester. This report shall include, but not be limited to, the following information: date of test, constant flow rate of drawdown test in gallons per minute, duration of test, hourly drawdown readings, and recovery data readings;

(7) Multiple-parcel or state small domestic water system source test reports shall also include: drawdown and recovery curves on logarithm vs. time graph; transmissibility calculation; geohydrological evaluation of the underground water formation or basin; and certification that water resources are available in sufficient quantity and on a long-term basis to supply the proposed domestic water system and meet the minimum yield requirements of this chapter. (Ord. No. 4181, § 2)

**Mandates and Service Levels:**

Providing direction to staff regarding policy interpretation is a legislative act under the jurisdiction of the Board of Supervisors.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

The cost of staff time will vary depending on the direction provided by your Board. The minimal staff time required to date is funded by the Community Plan Program on Page D-286 of the adopted 04/05 FY Budget.

**Special Instructions:**

Clerk of the Board shall forward a copy of the Minute Order to Planning & Development, attn: Hearing Support, Cintia Mendoza.

Attachment: CEQA Notice of Exemption

**NOTICE OF EXEMPTION**

TO: Santa Barbara County Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

FROM: Development Review Division; Planning and Development

Based on a preliminary review of the project the following activity is determined to be exempt from further environmental review requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970, as defined in the State and County Guidelines for the implementation of CEQA.

APNs: N/A

Location: N/A (County-wide)

Project Title: CEQA Threshold for Environmental Review of Bedrock Aquifers

**Project Description:**

**Adoption of the following Threshold of Significance for impacts on water resources:**

**For discretionary development proposals in designated rural areas on parcels of 20 acres in size or more that involve an estimated gross (applied) water demand of 5.0 acre-feet per year or less, including necessary treatment, proposed to be served by a groundwater well that produces from a bedrock aquifer as determined by P&D, withdrawal of 5.0 acre-feet per year or less from a bedrock aquifer is considered to not have the potential for a significant impact on water resources.**

Exempt Status: (Check one)

- Ministerial
- Statutory
- Categorical Exemption
- Emergency Project
- No Possibility of Significant Effect [§15061(b,3)]

Cite specific CEQA Guideline Section(s): This project can be found to be exempt from environmental review under CEQA Guideline Section 15061(b)(3). This section exempts projects that do not have the potential to cause a significant effect on the environment.

**Reasons to support exemption findings:**

Adoption of the proposed Threshold would establish a *de minimus* level of groundwater extraction from a bedrock aquifer at 5.0 Acre-Feet per Year (AFY). Annual extractions below this level would be considered less than significant. This minor change in the CEQA Threshold would not result in substantial effects on water resources because:

- The minimal level of groundwater withdrawal would have only a negligible effect on the general availability or quantity of groundwater resources, or on the discharge of groundwater to the surface.
- The rate of pumpage required to produce 5.0 AFY of water (3.0 gallons per minute) does not have the potential to cause substantial interference with the production of other nearby wells in the same aquifer.
- Such minor extractions do not have the potential to substantially affect nearby users of other bedrock aquifers as the hydrologic connection between bedrock aquifers is very limited to nonexistent.
- Supplemental water resources to sustain minimal domestic use can generally be developed on large rural parcels with the installation of an additional well(s).

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Department/Division Representative

Date

Note: A copy must be filed with the County Clerk of the Board after project approval and posted by the Clerk of the Board for a period of 30 days to begin a 35 day statute of limitations on legal challenges.

distribution: Lisa Martin  
Project file

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Date File of Counter Clerk