San Diego County
Local Agency Formation Commission
Regional Service Planning | Subdivision of the State of California

6a

AGENDA REPORT
Public Hearing

November 1, 2021

TO: Commissioners

FROM: Keene Simonds, Executive Officer
Priscilla Allen, Analyst I

SUBJECT: **Proposed Sphere of Influence Update for Ramona Municipal Water District**

SUMMARY

The San Diego County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) will consider approving a sphere of influence update for the Ramona Municipal Water District (MWD) as part of a regular review requirement under statute. Staff recommends two distinct changes to Ramona MWD's sphere and its two categories. The first change involves expanding the primary sphere by 36 acres along its southern perimeter to create a clear demarcation of future service expectations between Ramona MWD and the City of Poway. The second change involves establishing a new study area to the secondary sphere for wastewater services to include the 389-acre "Cumming Ranch" project to facilitate and spotlight discussions with the developer on an anticipated proposal filing. Staff recommends the Commission proceed to approve the recommendations by resolution and in doing so allow for a formal 30-day reconsideration period as provided under statute.

BACKGROUND

Spheres of Influence

LAFCOs establish and maintain spheres of influence for all cities and most special districts to officially designate the territory it independently believes represents the appropriate and probable future service areas and jurisdictional boundaries of the affected agencies. All

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jurisdictional changes must be consistent with the spheres of the affected agencies with limited exceptions. LAFCOs are also directed to update spheres every five years based on information generated in preceding municipal service reviews.

Informing Document to Sphere Update | Municipal Service Review on the Ramona Region

San Diego LAFCO recently prepared a municipal service review on the Ramona region with specific focus on the Ramona MWD as the principal local government operating in the area subject to Commission oversight. The final report on the municipal service review was accepted by the Commission at its October 4, 2021 meeting and serves as an independent evaluation of the availability, need, and sufficiency of services relative to the Commission's growth management interests and tasks. The final report includes a recommendation –and among others – to proceed with a limited update to Ramona MWD's sphere to largely maintain the baseline with a modest expansion to provide a more orderly and notional designation along the southern perimeter. A summary of all key conclusions and recommendations in the municipal service review is provided as Attachment One.

DISCUSSION

This item is for San Diego LAFCO to perform its regular sphere of influence review and update for the Ramona MWD. The Commission established the sphere in 1983 and – markedly – bifurcated it in 1994 into two distinct categories: primary and secondary – as described below.

- The primary sphere dates to 1983 and covers Ramona MWD's potable water, fire protection, emergency medical, and park and recreation functions. The primary sphere is 46,005 acres in size and includes all jurisdictional lands. The total resident population within this category is estimated by LAFCO at 35,369.

- The secondary sphere dates to 1994 and covers Ramona MWD's wastewater function only. The secondary sphere is internal to the primary sphere and is 11,769 acres in size and divided between two non-contiguous areas: Santa Margarita and San Vicente. The total resident population within this category is estimated by LAFCO at 25,108.

A map of Ramona MWD's sphere and its two categories is provided as Attachment One.

ANALYSIS

Staff has identified two distinct changes meriting consideration by San Diego LAFCO as part of its planned sphere of influence update on Ramona MWD. The first change would expand the primary sphere by 36 acres on the southern perimeter along Dos Picos Park Road and Cloudy Moon Drive. The acreage consists of three assessor parcels and its addition to the primary sphere would eliminate an existing unincorporated corridor between the City of

Poway and Ramona MWD respective spheres.[1] The addition would relatedly signal the Commission's policy expectation that any development and/or other uses meriting municipal water, fire protection, emergency medical, and park and recreation should be accommodated through Ramona MWD via future annexation approvals by LAFCO. The second change would establish a special study area to the secondary sphere comprising 389 acres and located immediately outside the activated wastewater service zone established by LAFCO. The acreage consists of 9 assessor parcels and located along Highland Valley Road and part of a development application under administrative review by the County of San Diego known as "Cumming Ranch."[2] The establishment of the study area would signal the Commission's intent to explore the merits of an otherwise substantive expansion in the secondary sphere and related jurisdictional change while spotlighting the topic for the benefit of the public.

As referenced in the preceding section, the proposed changes to Ramona MWD's sphere of influence are purposefully limited consistent with the recommendation of the recently completed municipal service review on the Ramona region. A more comprehensive update – including a closer look to ensure appropriate syncing of the sphere with geographic features and/or parcel lines – is deferred to future review.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended San Diego LAFCO approve a limited update to Ramona MWD's sphere of influence affecting both the primary and secondary categories as described and consistent with Alternative One as outlined in the succeeding section.

ALTERNATIVES FOR ACTION

The following alternative actions are available to San Diego LAFCO and can be accomplished through a single-approved motion.

Alternative One (recommended):

1. Adopt the draft resolution provided as Attachment Two approving an update to Ramona MWD's sphere to include the following changes:

    a) Expand the primary sphere to include "Area A" as shown in Exhibit B to the attached draft resolution.

    b) Establish a study area to the secondary sphere to include "Areas B" as shown in Exhibit B of the attached draft resolution.

Alternative Two:
Continue the item and request additional information from staff as needed.

[1] The affected assessor parcel numbers are 278-270-30, 278-391-11 and 278-391-10.
[2] The "Cumming Ranch" project as currently contemplated spans approximately 683 acres with 67% dedicated to open space and the remaining – 215 acres – proposed to be developed into 125 single family residential lots at an average dwelling unit density of 0.58 dwelling units per acre.

PROCEDURES FOR CONSIDERATION

This item has been placed on San Diego LAFCO's agenda for action as part of a noticed public hearing. The following procedures are recommended in the consideration of this item:

1) Receive verbal presentation from staff unless waived.
2) Initial questions or clarifications from the Commission.
3) Open the hearing and invite public comments.
4) Discuss item and consider the staff recommendation.

On behalf of the Executive Officer,



Priscilla Allen
Analyst I

Attachments:

1) Summary of Key Conclusions and Recommendations in Ramona Region MSR
2) Letter from Cumming Ranch Proponent
3) Draft Resolution Updating Ramona MWD's Sphere of Influence
   - Exhibit A: Written Determinations
   - Exhibit B: Proposed Update

Municipal Service Review

RAMONA REGION

FINAL

REPORT SUMMARY | October 2021

Central Themes and Conclusions

The Ramona region represents one of the largest and growing unincorporated communities in San Diego County with a current estimated population of 37,708 – an amount that exceeds 5 of the 18 cities. The region's status as a prominent unincorporated area dates to the 1840s and the arrival of community patriarchs Joaquin Ortega and Adolpho Stokes and the subsequent establishment of a stagecoach stop and adjoining general store to accommodate travelers going to and from the goldmines to the east in Julian. The region began transitioning to a stand-alone destination at the turn of the century and marked by outside investments and ensuing subdivisions recorded by the Santa Maria Land and Water Company. This transition was headlined by the official naming of the community as "Ramona" with the permanent population reaching approximately 1,000 by 1900 – which at the time made Ramona the largest unincorporated area in all of San Diego County.

The County of San Diego remained the lone source of local government for the Ramona region through the start of the new century until the formation of the Ramona Irrigation District (1925) and its construction of the first community water system. Markedly, the formation of the Ramona Irrigation District paralleled initial community discussions on incorporation and subsequently supplemented by additional special district formations to expand the scope of local government in the region to include the Ramona Fire Protection District (1946), Ramona Sanitation District (1946), Ramona MWD (1958), and Mt. Woodson Ranch Sanitation District (1988). Ramona MWD's proved most consequential, and through a combination of latent power activations and consolidations it has emerged as the singular provider of potable water, wastewater, fire protection and emergency medical, parks and recreation, and recycled water in the region.



Beautiful Lake Ramona in San Diego

Today the Ramona region serves as a unique community separator in San Diego County with urban uses to the west and non-urban uses to the east. Ramona itself remains largely rural with the notable exception of the central "village" area located along Main Street, which increasingly includes several financial, retail, and restaurant franchises and serves as the region's social and economic hub.

A review of the Ramona region relative to San Diego LAFCO's growth management tasks and interests as prescribed under statute produces eight central themes or conclusions. These conclusions focus – albeit not exclusively – on the availability, need, and adequacy of municipal services by Ramona MWD as the central service provider in the region. The conclusions are independently drawn and largely sourced to information collected and analyzed by the Commission between 2015 and 2019 and further detailed in the agency profile (Chapter Three).

Ramona MWD has emerged as the central municipal service provider in the region and its core activities – specifically water, wastewater, fire protection – and adequacies therein are essential in supporting current and future growth.

1 Evolving Community Character

Ramona's community character continues to evolve and most notably towards a more traditional suburb setting with urban-type landscapes. This transition is reflected in the relatively high population growth rate in the region over the report period at 1.1% annually, which is more than one-fifth above the countywide average. The population is also increasingly more affluent than past generations with the average median household income equaling $92,543 at the end of the five-year report. This median income is more than two-fifths above the corresponding rate for all of San Diego County and – and among other factors – aided by the 17% increase in four-year college graduates over the 60-month period.



2 Expanded and Centralized Role of Ramona MWD

Ramona's evolving community character towards more traditional suburban uses has relatedly generated additional demands and expectations on local government in the region. Ramona MWD has affirmatively responded to these changes over its 60-year plus history and through a combination of consolidations and latent power expansions evolved into a multi-purpose agency and now the centralized provider of water, wastewater, fire protection and emergency medical, parks and recreation, and recycled water in the region. Further expansions – however and irrespective of any merit – is limited under the principal act.

3 Adequate Service Capacities at MWD with One Notable Exception

As the principal municipal service provider in the region, Ramona MWD has developed adequate infrastructure capacities and related administrative controls to meet current and projected demands in the timeframe of this report with one exception. This exception involves meeting wastewater demands within the Santa Maria service area, which covers central Ramona and now regularly exceeds permitted capacities during high-rain periods due to excessive inflow (surface) and/or infiltration (groundwater) intrusion.

4 Need for Capital Improvement Investments within MWD

Notwithstanding the overall adequacy of current municipal service capacities, Ramona MWD would benefit from additional investment into its capital assets with specific focus on remedying the increasing and varying pipeline ages involving both its water and wastewater systems. Capital planning and investment in parks and recreation is also merited to help advise its contract provider (Ramona Parks and Recreation Association) and includes addressing improvements to the Wellfield Park and its Community Center and Rodeo Arena.

5 MWD's Positive Financial Standing

Ramona MWD improved its financial standing during the report period as measured by its audited net position with an overall 12% increase from $86 to $105 million. This improvement largely ties to Ramona MWD achieving an average annual bottom line – or total margin – and contributes to an ending unrestricted fund balance sufficient to meet 18 months of operating expenses. Ramona MWD also finished the period with a relatively well-funded employee pension program with a composite funded ratio of 80 percent.

6 Advancing Regional Fire Protection Services

Existing fire protection and emergency medical service in the Ramona region are equally divided between two special districts: Ramona MWD and San Diego County FPD. Both special districts choose to contract with CALFIRE for day-to-day field operations. This common arrangement – notably – suggest consolidating fire protection responsibilities under the San Diego County FPD's economies of scale would advantageously sync and enhance service levels while providing local control.

7 The Curious Case of Incorporation

There has been reoccurring interest in the Ramona region to incorporate and transition local governance from the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors to a newly established city council. Most recently, incorporation proponents approached LAFCO with pre-application submittals as required under policy in 1982 and 2005 before choosing not to proceed with official filings. It is nonetheless reasonable to assume future interest in incorporation will reemerge within Ramona given it size and local resources – including a combination of both property and sales taxes. Accordingly, it would be beneficial for LAFCO to prepare an informational report to advise on current statutory thresholds and associated incorporation opportunities in San Diego County to include – but not limited to – Ramona.

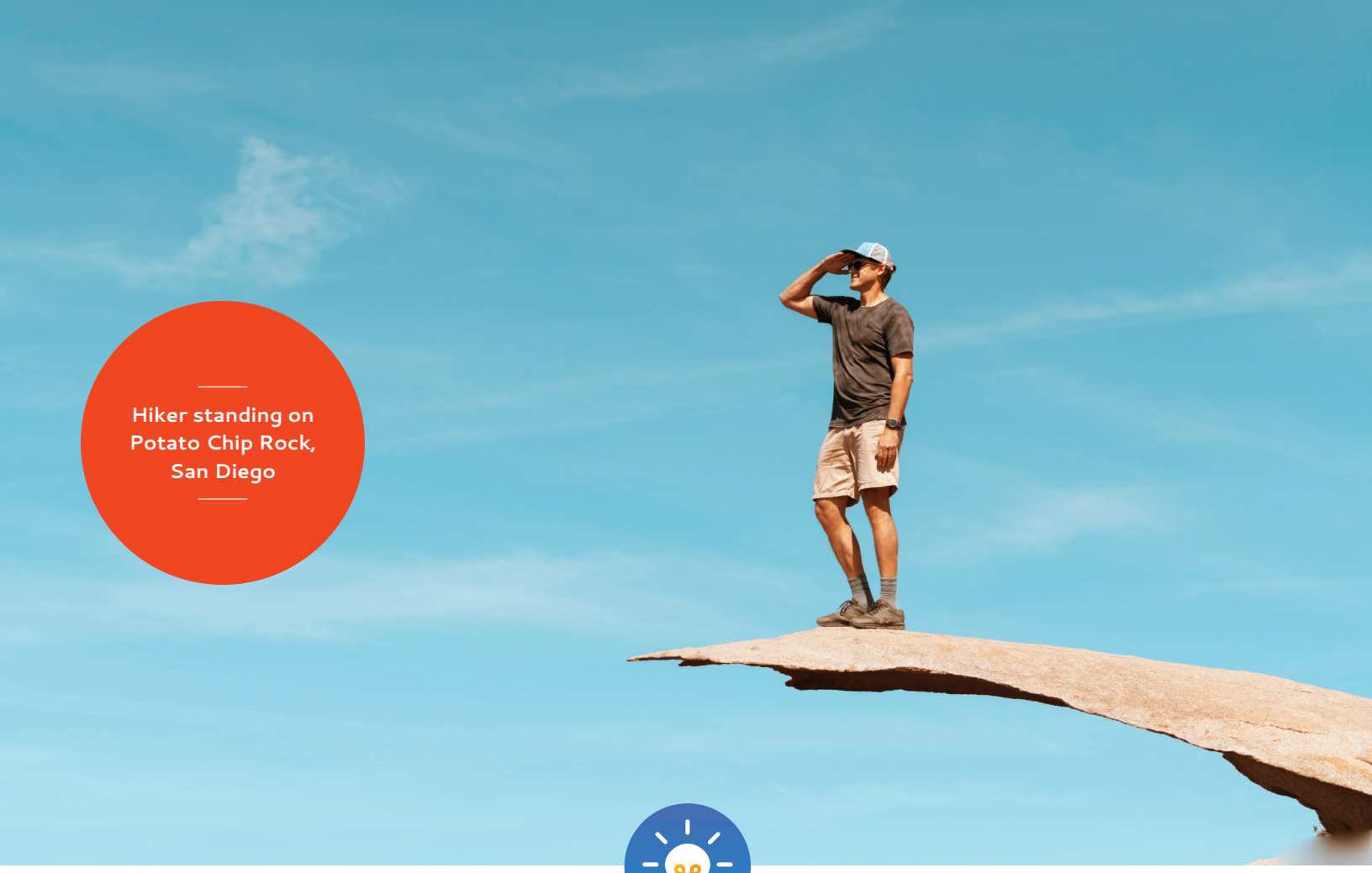
8 The Clearer Case for a Community Services District

Irrespective of the preceding topic on incorporation, the Ramona region has already established itself as an economic and socially distinct community in San Diego County. Ramona MWD has evolved accordingly and expanded its service functions to meet the community's needs and now operating at the authority limits under the MWD principal act. Reorganization into a community services district (CSD) appears meritorious in providing the region with a local governance model that can provide a complete range of municipal services with LAFCO approval with the lone exception of direct land use control. Reorganizing into CSD – markedly – would also serve as the preferred governance step towards a potential transition into an incorporated community.

The Ramona region is one of the largest unincorporated areas in San Diego County with an estimated resident population of 37,708.



A dirt trail leading up to a hilltop lined with boulders at Ramona Grasslands Preserve in San Diego



Hiker standing on Potato Chip Rock, San Diego

Recommendations

The following recommendations call for specific actions either from San Diego LAFCO and/or other local government agencies based on information generated in this report and outlined below in order of their placement in Section 5.0 (Written Determinations). Recommendations for Commission action are dependent on a subsequent directive through the adopted work plan.

1. The Commission should coordinate with SANDAG to identify current buildout estimates relative to existing zoning standards by the County of San Diego for the Ramona region and incorporate the information into the next municipal service review. This should include assessing potential impacts tied to the recent passage of Senate Bill 9 (Weiner) and the allowance for additional lot splitting to accommodate more housing throughout California.
2. The Commission should perform additional analysis with respect to water, wastewater, and fire protection needs for adjacent lands to the Ramona region that qualify as disadvantaged unincorporated communities and incorporate accordingly into future service reviews.
3. Ramona MWD should address excessive inflow and infiltration issues within its Santa Maria wastewater collection system in order to reduce system peaking factor and the elevated threat of raw sewage spills and/or related impacts to the environment.
4. Ramona MWD should develop a facility improvement plan to guide its parks and recreation function and engage constituents in doing so in setting long-term service goals and amenities.
5. The Commission should defer its statutory task to address service levels and related needs of the lone mutual water company in the Ramona region – Rancho Santa Teresa – to a scheduled information report as part of the 2021-2022 workplan.



Main Street in Ramona, California

6. Ramona MWD should revisit and realign its water service operating costs and user rates to remedy a sizeable structural deficit of nearly nine-fold during the five-year report period.

7. Ramona MWD should expand its existing community outreach efforts by establishing social media uses and live-streaming meetings to affirmatively add to existing efforts in spotlighting its activities and further facilitate opportunities for community input.

8. Ramona MWD should consider the following actions with respect to improving current fire protection and emergency medical services:

   - Ramona MWD should consider adopting response time standards with desired time dependent benchmarks and making these parts of the contract language with CAL FIRE.
   - Ramona MWD should develop a vegetation management plan to mitigate the wildfire risk to the community. Similarly, a comprehensive review of community disaster risk should be completed and submitted to the County Office of Emergency Services for review and inclusion in the County's Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan.

9. Ramona MWD and San Diego County FPD should consider a voluntary consolidation under the FPD's greater economies of scale to sync and enhance service levels for the common benefit of the Ramona region and need to vigilantly protect against wildfires.

10. The Commission should address and reconcile Ramona MWD's recycled water service activity as part of a future update to Rule No. 4 with respect to formally identifying the function, class, and authorized location under statute.

11. The Commission should prepare a future informational report to advise on current statutory thresholds and associated incorporation opportunities in San Diego County to include – but not limited to – the Ramona region as the one of the largest unincorporated communities.

12. Reorganization of Ramona MWD into a community services district merits exploration in providing the Ramona region a local governance model that can continue to evolve with the community needs and – pertinently – serves as the preferred transitional vehicle to a potential future incorporation should circumstances warrant.

13. There appears to be sufficient merit to immediately proceed with a limited update and expansion to Ramona MWD's sphere of influence and add approximately 30 unincorporated acres lying immediately outside the current designation along Dos Picos Park Road.

14. Additional amendments to the Ramona MWD sphere of influence may also be warranted subject to a more comprehensive update as part of the next scheduled study.

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September 28, 2021 669-013

LAFCO
2550 Fifth Avenue, Suite 725
San Diego, CA 92103

Attention: Keene Simonds, Executive Officer

Subject: Request to Include the Cumming Ranch Project within the Ramona Municipal Water District in the Municipal Sphere Update Process

On behalf of the Cumming Ranch project located in Ramona, California, we are requesting that LAFCO include the Cuming Ranch project in the current sphere update process which is ongoing at present and slated to be completed in November 2021. The Cumming Ranch property is within the municipal boundary of the Ramona Municipal Water District and it is outside of the District's sewer service area. It is our intention to annex the Cumming Ranch property into the Sewer Service Area of the Ramona Municipal Water District to obtain sewer service for the proposed residential homes planned for this property.

The Cumming Ranch Specific Planning Area is part of the Ramona Community Planning Area located in central San Diego County. The Cumming Ranch project site is located approximately 20 miles northeast of downtown San Diego, 11 miles east of Interstate 15, and 15 miles north of Interstate 8. The project site is located immediately west of the Ramona Town Center and north of the intersection of State Route 67 and Highland Valley Road. To the north of the property is the Ramona Airport, and to the south and west and along portions of the north boundary are residential homes on lots mostly ranging in size from 1 to 5 acres.

The proposed Cumming Ranch project consists of 682.6 acres. Of the 682.6 acres, 457.8 acres (approximately 67 percent) will be open space. The residential development portion of the site will encompass 215.0 acres. Approximately 9.8 acres of the property will be future right-of-way for Highland Valley Road and SR 67.

The residential portion of the project will consist of 125 single family residential lots, ranging in size from 1.0 to 3.1 acres. Average residential lot size will be approximately 1.5 acres and the average dwelling unit density is 0.58 DU/acre. The residential lots are designed to be consistent with the rural character of the Ramona community.

We have reviewed the Ramona Region Municipal Services Review report prepared by LAFCO dated August 2021. The proposed development of the Cumming Ranch project and its desire to annex into the Ramona MWD for sewer service is considered to be consistent with the views expressed in the report. The Cumming Ranch will offer new housing for an expanding region benefiting the continued growth of the Ramona area. The Cumming Ranch project is seeking to obtain municipal services for the project by connecting to the existing public agency services to ensure a high quality of life for the future residents of this development.

For these reasons, we are requesting that LAFCO would include the Cumming Ranch in the ongoing sphere update process.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

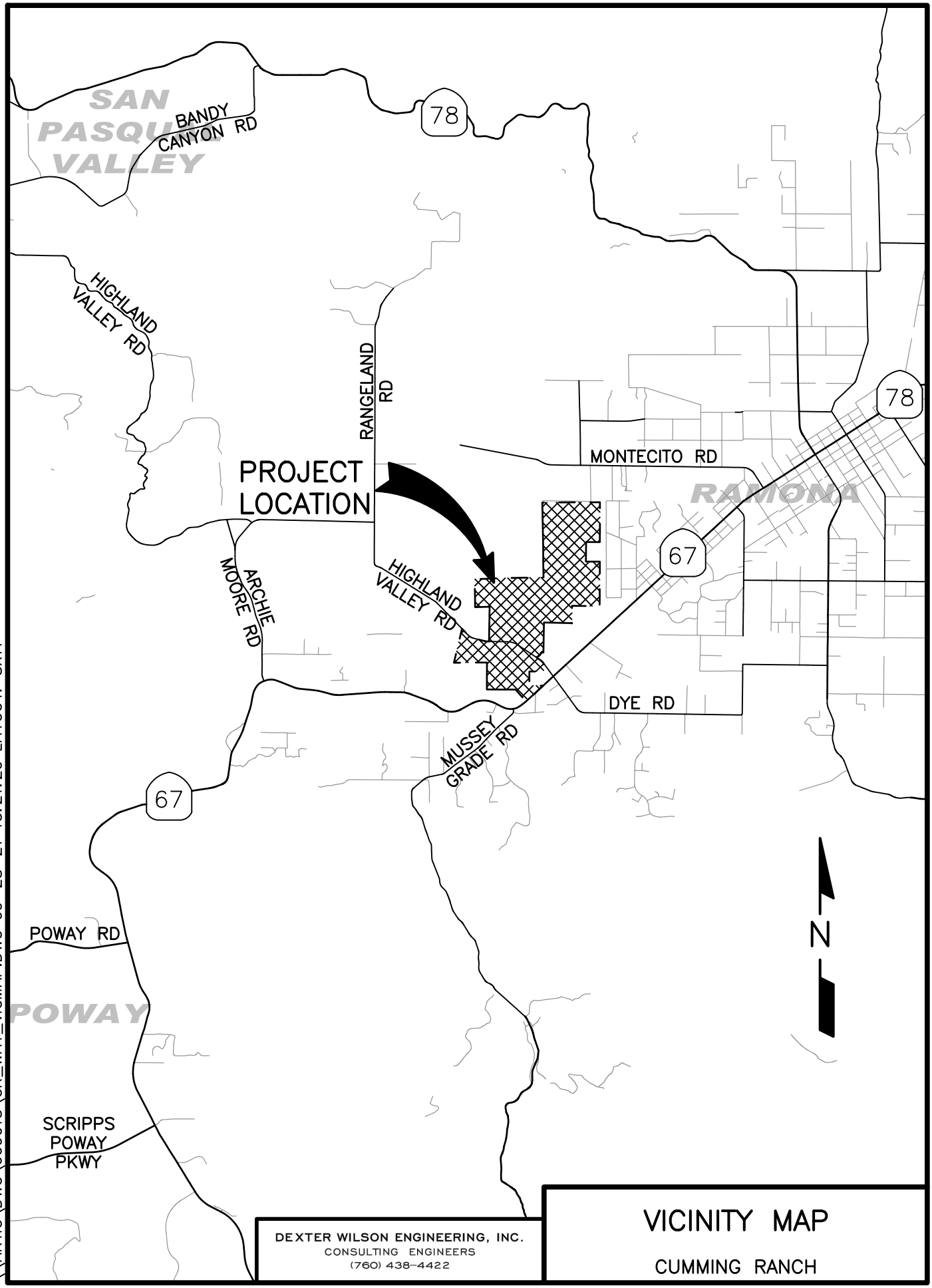
Dexter Wilson Engineering, Inc.

Andrew Oven, P.E.

AO:ah

Attachment

cc: Bruce Tabb, Environmental Development
Chris Brown, Alchemy Consulting Group
Michael Metts, Ramona Municipal Water District
Ricardo Soto, Ramona Municipal Water District



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DEXTER WILSON ENGINEERING, INC.
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VICINITY MAP

CUMMING RANCH

RESOLUTION NO.

RESOLUTION OF THE
SAN DIEGO COUNTY LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION
MAKING DETERMINATIONS

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE UPDATE
RAMONA MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT

WHEREAS, the San Diego County Local Agency Formation Commission, hereinafter referred to as the "Commission", is a political subdivision of the State of California with regulatory and planning responsibilities to facilitate orderly growth and development under the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is responsible under Government Code Section 56425 to establish spheres of influence for all local agencies under Commission oversight with the added statutory directive that all jurisdictional changes must be consistent with the affected agencies' spheres with limited exceptions; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is also responsible under Government Code Section 56425 to review and update all local agencies' spheres of influence every five years as necessary; and

WHEREAS, the Commission recently completed a regional municipal service review covering the Ramona Municipal Water District and its active service functions; and

WHEREAS, the regional municipal service review covering the Ramona Municipal Water District was accepted by the Commission on October 4, 2021 and serves as the informing document for the Commission to proceed with a sphere of influence update; and

WHEREAS, the Executive Officer's written report and recommendations on a sphere of influence update for Ramona Municipal Water District was presented to the Commission in a manner provided by law; and

WHEREAS, the Commission heard and fully considered all the evidence presented at a public meeting concerning the sphere of influence update for Ramona Municipal Water District on November 1, 2021;

WHEREAS, as part of the sphere of influence update process, the Commission is required pursuant to Government Code Section 56425(e) to make a statement of written determinations with regards to certain factors.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Commission hereby finds, determines, and orders the following:

1. The Commission determines the sphere of influence update for Ramona Municipal Water District represents a project under the California Environmental Quality Act but exempt from further review under the "general rule" provided under State Guidelines 15061(b)(3). This exemption appropriately applies given it can be seen with certainty spheres of influence are planning policies and any amendments or updates do not make any changes to the environment or authorize any new uses or services.

2. The Commission has considered the Executive Officer's written report on the sphere of influence update and recommendations therein.

3. The Commission makes the statements set forth in Exhibit "A" in determining the sphere of influence for Ramona Municipal Water District.

4. The Commission APPROVES an update to the existing sphere of influence for the Ramona Municipal Water District to include the following changes:

   a) The primary sphere – which aligns to Ramona Municipal Water District's potable water, fire protection, emergency medical, and park and recreation functions – is expanded by approximately 36 acres to include "Area A" as shown in Exhibit B and comprises assessor parcel numbers 278-270-30, 278-391-11 and 278-391-10.

   b) The secondary sphere – which aligns to Ramona Municipal Water District's wastewater function – is modified to include approximately 389 acres in the form of a study area shown as "Area B" in Exhibit B.

5. The effective date of the sphere of influence update shall be immediate upon the successful completion of the 30-day reconsideration period under Government Code 56895. Any person or affected agency requesting the Commission reconsider its approvals herein shall comply with the procedures and timeline established in this statute.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Commission on November 1, 2021 by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAINING:

ATTEST:

_____
Keene Simonds
Executive Officer

EXHIBIT A

STATEMENT OF DETERMINATIONS
GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 56425

1. With respect to present and planned land uses in the area as required under Section 56425(e)(1), the Commission independently determines the following.

    a) Most land within the Ramona Municipal Water District's sphere of influence consist of low density residential and commercial agriculture uses paired with local serving commercial and retail uses along with public open space. The proposed update as described supports these present and planned land uses.

2. With respect to present and probable need for public facilities and services in the area as required under Section 56425(e)(2), the Commission independently determines the following.

    a) The proposed sphere of influence update appropriately demarks the Ramona Municipal Water District's current and/or probable future boundary and service area.

3. With respect to present capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services the agencies' provide or are authorized to provide as required under Section 56425(e)(3), the Commission independently determines the following.

    a) A comprehensive evaluation of the Ramona Municipal Water District and its core service functions has been separately prepared by the Commission as part of a regional municipal service review. The Commission relies on the municipal service review in making all related sphere of influence determinations for the Ramona Municipal Water District.

4. With respect to the existence of any relevant social or economic community of interest in the area as required under Section 56425(e)(4), the Commission independently determines the following.

    a) The proposed sphere of influence update appropriately reflects existing and relevant social and economic communities of interests between the Ramona Municipal Water District and its active service functions as determined by the Commission.

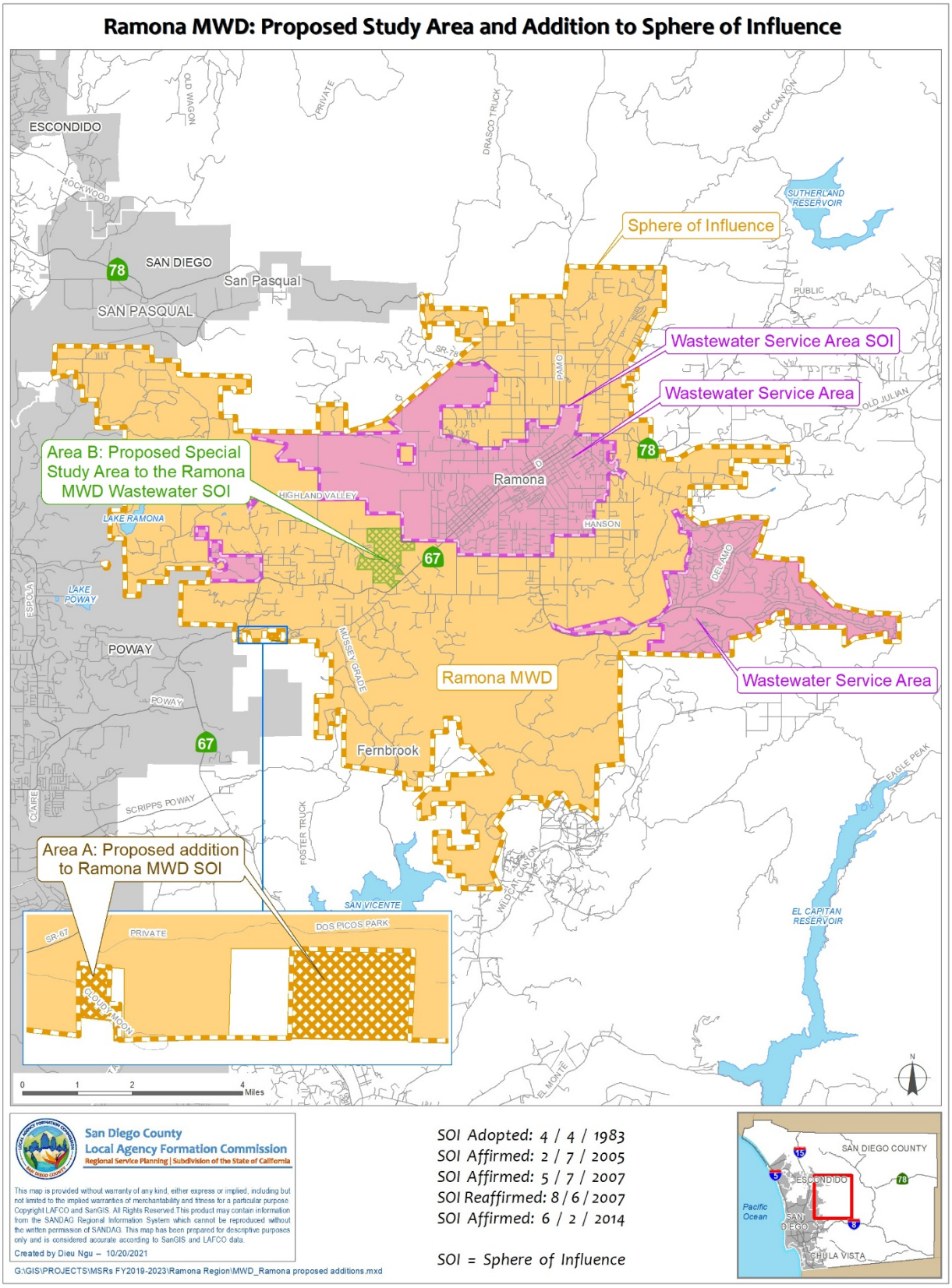
5. With respect to the present and probable need for public water, sewer, and fire protection services of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or adjacent to the sphere as required under Section 56425(e)(5), the Commission independently determines the following.

    a) Approximately one-tenth of the Ramona region qualifies as a disadvantaged unincorporated community under San Diego LAFCO policy. One-quarter of the qualifying lands concurrently lie within the Ramona Municipal Water District and accordingly receive – or at least eligible to receive – public water, wastewater, and fire protection services. Land immediately to the north also qualifies as a disadvantaged unincorporated community under San Diego LAFCO policy. Additional analysis is needed to determine the percentage of these qualifying lands that concurrently lie within public water, wastewater, and fire protection service providers.

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EXHIBIT B

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE UPDATE
RAMONA MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT



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