

WWTP Ad Hoc Committee Meeting Summary Report

Meeting Dates: 3 and 8 September 2026

Committee Members Present: Rock Rockenbach, Carter Ohlmann

Staff Present: General Manager Weigold, Stephen, Bryce and Marco

Contractors Present: none

Duration: Approximately 2.0 hours each

Submitted by: Carter Ohlmann; September 8, 2026

Overview

Technical Memo Two (TM2) is the component of the Southland Investment Grade Audit (IGA) that begins to address the potential cost and feasibility of connecting the Montecito Sanitary District to the City of Santa Barbara's El Estero Water Resource Center. The Board approved the Southland contract to include TM2 at the 10 September 2025 meeting. Discussions with Southland and staff about the scope of TM2 has led the Committee to discuss whether the current scope will provide the Board the information it needs to make an informed decision regarding local treatment or connecting to Santa Barbara – El Estero.

The meeting focused on the contracted scope of TM2, the limitations of that scope for decision-making, and the need for more comprehensive information to allow an informed comparison between continued local treatment and connection to Santa Barbara. This additional information would include the risks and costs associated with connection to the City, including both construction and ongoing operational costs.

The discussion began with consideration of the decision-making process and the recognition that a difficult decision will likely need to be made with incomplete and imperfect information. The discussion then moved to identifying the salient information needed to evaluate the alternatives of plant rehabilitation, contracting with the City of Santa Barbara for treatment, or potentially some combination of the two. The Committee recognized that individual Directors may identify different information as important and may weigh that information differently in reaching their decisions.

The Committee also discussed the appropriate level of expenditure on additional information gathering and the amount of time that should be allowed for that work. A significant cost component of connection to the City centers around wet-weather flow and what equalization capacity will ultimately be required at the Montecito WWTP. The Committee agreed that, if TM2 is being used to evaluate the cost of local treatment versus the cost of connecting to the City, it should establish engineering assumptions sufficient to support a meaningful cost comparison. This

requires information from the City of Santa Barbara regarding the maximum inflow rates and durations that the City will accept. Obtaining this information will likely involve the Santa Barbara City Council, meaning it may be a relatively slow process. It may also require additional expenditure if the Board determines that an independent consultant or consulting firm should facilitate the information-gathering process.

Board-Level Summary

Technical Memo Two (TM2) is the component of the Southland Investment Grade Audit (IGA) that begins to address the potential cost and feasibility of connecting the Montecito Sanitary District to the City of Santa Barbara's El Estero Water Resource Center. The Board has approved the Southland contract that includes TM2 at a cost of roughly \$50k; however, the Committee discussed whether the current scope of TM2 will provide sufficient information to support an informed decision regarding the future of wastewater treatment—whether through rehabilitation or replacement of the existing Montecito treatment plant, connection to El Estero, or some combination of the two.

The Committee recognizes that the eventual decision will be complex and will likely need to be made with incomplete and imperfect information. The purpose of the discussion was therefore not to determine which alternative is preferable at this stage, but to identify the information most important to evaluating the alternatives and to consider the appropriate amount of time and expenditure needed to obtain that information.

A principal issue is the extent to which wet-weather flows affect the cost and feasibility of connecting to El Estero. Both Montecito and Santa Barbara wastewater inflows vary substantially between dry and wet weather. During two of the last three winters wet weather inflows have substantially exceeded WWTP design capacity at both Montecito and El Estero. If wastewater is conveyed to Santa Barbara, the connection will likely require substantial equalization storage, pumping capacity, and a force main capable of operating within limits established by the City. The size and cost of these facilities will depend not only on Montecito's flows, but also on conveyance limitations the City is expected to impose.

Consequently, a meaningful cost comparison cannot be based solely on the cost of constructing a pipeline and pump station. The analysis should also consider the required equalization capacity, pump station and force-main sizing, major crossings and other site constraints, connection and capacity charges, ongoing treatment charges paid to the City, pumping and maintenance costs, and the costs associated with modifying or decommissioning portions of the existing Montecito treatment plant. These costs should ultimately be considered on a life-cycle basis rather than as isolated capital expenditures.

The Committee therefore agreed that, if TM2 is to be used as a basis for comparing the cost of local treatment with the cost of connecting to Santa Barbara, it should establish the principal

engineering assumptions necessary for a meaningful comparison. At a minimum, this includes defining the assumed dry- and wet-weather flows, required equalization volume, maximum discharge rate to the City, force-main and pump-station requirements, and the major components of the connection cost.

An important limitation is that some of these assumptions cannot be established by Montecito or Southland alone. Information from the City of Santa Barbara will be needed regarding the maximum flow rate, duration, and other conditions under which the City would accept wastewater from Montecito. Establishing those parameters may require discussions with City staff and potentially consideration by the Santa Barbara City Council. The timing and outcome of that process therefore introduce uncertainty into the schedule and cost of developing a definitive connection alternative.

The Committee also discussed the appropriate level of expenditure and amount of time that should be devoted to obtaining additional information. There is a point at which additional analysis becomes valuable because it materially reduces uncertainty, but there is also a point at which further study may provide diminishing returns. The Board will ultimately need to balance the value of additional information against its cost and the need to make timely decisions regarding the existing treatment plant.

At this stage, the most useful objective is therefore to establish the key engineering and financial parameters that would allow the alternatives to be compared on a consistent basis. The Board does not necessarily need a level of analysis sufficient to eliminate all uncertainty. Rather, it needs sufficient information to understand the magnitude of the costs, the principal risks, and the consequences of the assumptions underlying each alternative.

The TM2 workplan does not provide all of this information. Thus, the Board may wish to consider whether additional work should be authorized under the Southland contract or whether an independent consultant should be engaged to assist with information gathering and evaluation. In particular, independent assistance may be useful in facilitating discussions with the City of Santa Barbara and in developing a consistent life-cycle cost comparison of local treatment and connection.

The Committee's discussion suggests a sequential approach to obtaining the information needed for the Board's eventual decision – though the timeline seems insufficient for mitigating the risk of operating a WWTP with significant deferred maintenance.

1. Obtain the City's flow-acceptance parameters. Timeline: 3 months (handshake) to 1 year (Official). Resources: Staff & Consultant.
2. Determine the maximum flow rates, durations, and other relevant conditions under which Santa Barbara would accept wastewater from Montecito. This is a critical initial

assumption because it will influence the amount of equalization storage and the size of the pumping and conveyance facilities required. In parallel with 1. Resources: Staff & Consultant.

3. Establish the engineering assumptions for the connection. Using the City's requirements together with Montecito's dry- and wet-weather flow data, establish the preliminary equalization volume, pump-station capacity, force-main size and capacity, and other major infrastructure requirements. Timeline: 3-6 months *after* completion of #'s 1 & 2. Resources: Staff & Consultant
4. Evaluate the alternatives and associated risks. With the major cost and engineering assumptions established, the Board can evaluate not only the expected financial cost of each alternative, but also the principal operational, environmental, regulatory, contractual, and implementation risks. Timeline: 3-6 months *after* completion of #3. Resources: Staff & Consultant
5. Determine whether additional technical work is warranted. Once the principal engineering assumptions are established, determine whether the existing scope provides sufficient information or whether additional work by Southland or another independent consultant is justified. This allows additional expenditures to be targeted toward reducing the uncertainties that are most important to the Board's decision. Timeline: 3-6 months *after* completion of #4. Resources: Staff & Consultant
6. Develop comparable life-cycle costs. Develop a consistent comparison of the long-term costs of the principal alternatives, including capital costs, operating and maintenance costs, City treatment and capacity charges, decommissioning or transition costs, and significant future capital requirements. Timeline: 6-9 months *after* completion of #5. Resources: Staff & Consultant

This sequence is intended to avoid committing significant resources to detailed analyses before the fundamental assumptions governing the connection are known. It also provides a framework for progressively improving the quality of the information available to the Board while recognizing that some uncertainty will remain. However, the timeline suggests a process that may take up to 2.5 years just to obtain information for decision making.

The Committee's discussion suggests that the immediate objective should be to improve the quality of the information available to the Board, rather than to reach a premature conclusion regarding the preferred alternative. Once the principal engineering assumptions, City requirements, capital costs, and ongoing operating costs are better defined, the Board will be in a substantially better position to evaluate the long-term financial and operational implications of rehabilitation, connection to El Estero, or a phased combination of the two.

Action Items Taken

None.

Recommendations to Board

It is recommended that the Board direct staff to determine the most appropriate approach and associated cost for obtaining the City of Santa Barbara's flow-acceptance parameters and determine how this information should be incorporated into the analysis of the Santa Barbara connection option.

It is recommended that individual Board members make requests to the WWTP Ad Hoc committee for information about the Santa Barbara – El Estero connection option essential to their decision-making process that can be obtained within the next 6 to 9 months.