



WEST COUNTY
WASTEWATER

**Grand Jury Report
Statement from the Board of Directors
February 2022**

At West County Wastewater, we are – and always have been – profoundly invested in serving in the public’s best interest. We are appalled by the misconduct of certain members of this Board, one of which resulted in a referral to the District Attorney and an investigation by the Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury.

As an organization that provides a vital public service to almost 100,000 people in our community, we are committed to great governance. Transparency, accountability, and trust are at the core of our operations and are the driver for all that we do. WCW will always operate in this manner, now and in the future.

Our dedication to improving the way we serve, our community, and our natural surroundings shines as a public agency. We will continue to lead the industry in innovation and modernization while adhering to all laws, procedures and best practices.

Furthermore, the Board stands by and supports our General Manager, Lisa Malek-Zadeh, who has modernized and invigorated this organization through strategic planning and steadfast leadership. We denounce the actions of certain Board members who have demeaned and belittled her because of a personal vendetta, and we will continue to champion her and her stellar work at WCW.

As a governing board, we are dismayed by the Grand Jury’s focus on procedural policies at WCW and lack of understanding of government agency best practices. While we are always open to improvements that support our ability to successfully serve, the original complaint did not involve allegations of financial or general mismanagement. The Grand Jury’s decision not to pursue the misconduct of this Board member and instead focus on agency operations was remiss.

This Board member’s actions are a distraction that has cost the District about \$200,000 for investigations and follow-up trainings, equivalent to the price of 60 grants to assist homeowners with the cost of replacing their laterals. This situation is blatantly unacceptable; misconduct by Board members should not cost the taxpayers money.

The report did not find evidence of irregularities in operations and procedures, but instead noted political and personal divisiveness among Board members as the probable basis for the complaint.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cesar Zepeda, President
Cheryl Sudduth, Vice President

David Alvarado, Director
Sherry Stanley, Director
Harry Wiener, Director

GENERAL MANAGER

Lisa K. Malek-Zadeh

GENERAL COUNSEL

Claire H. Collins, Esq.

Despite finding no evidence of wrongdoing, the Grand Jury recommends that WCW review certain policies and procedures. WCW is committed to regularly revisiting these documents. The Board's policies and procedures and the Managing Authority, including roles and responsibilities for the General Manager, were most recently updated in February 2021, supported and created by the same Board members who now state these policies are not reflective of their voice or the agency's best interest. Various financial policies were also revised in 2021. We welcome any opportunity to implement changes that increase agency or Board effectiveness and will again review some of these policies to ensure they are in line with current best practices.

WCW has always followed industry and public agency standards, and we will continue to do so. A recent survey of 19 other public organizations and discussions with professional associations that set the criteria for governance confirms our adherence. The majority of the report's findings and recommendations are already in concurrence with other government agency policies and procedures.

WCW has been recognized repeatedly by the industry's organizations that define benchmarks and standards for transparency and sound financial practices. We are proud of our commitment to accountability, and we stand by our operations and their consistency with proper practices.

For us, the most important components of our mission are the residents we serve, including responsible use of public funds, and the region in which we live. WCW remains dedicated to providing the best in wastewater service.