

3/24/2021

San José City Council
City of San José
200 E. Santa Clara Street
San José CA 95113

Comments for March 25, 2021 Study Session - Google Downtown West Mixed-Use Development District Utilities

Dear Mayor Liccardo, Vice Mayor Jones and Councilmembers:

On behalf of SPUR, I am writing to express support for Google's Downtown West energy and recycled water district systems, but we also urge San José to ensure that the district systems are well-integrated with the city's centralized systems for energy and recycled water.

Distributed systems such as district-scale approaches to supplying recycled water and renewable energy can, when properly managed, improve sustainability and resilience for the community. They can provide greater economies of scale than projects serving only a single building, while reducing losses during transmission and providing a local source of water and energy in case of disaster. In SPUR's report, *Future-Proof Water*, SPUR's board adopted the policy that Bay Area water managers should pursue demand management as a first priority, followed by supply augmentation approaches, including district-scale systems for recycled water.¹ Similarly, in SPUR's report, *Fossil-Free Bay Area*, SPUR's board adopted the policy that local government should encourage distributed energy generation and storage at all scales.²

While SPUR wholeheartedly supports district scale systems, we do emphasize two important conditions to our support for district scale recycled water. First, new private developments should pay for the extension of the centralized recycled water distribution system to their parcel whenever possible. Scaling up nonpotable recycled water in California's cities will require the expensive installation of an entirely new set of underground pipes for water distribution, informally known as "purple pipe." Extending the network of purple pipe throughout the city allows more users to connect inexpensively to recycled water supplies, and establishes long-term, easily-maintained access to recycled water for future property owners. Asking private property owners to fund the extension of the purple pipe system to their parcel whenever possible will allow the system to expand throughout the city without imposing the capital costs on San Jose Water

¹ Laura Tam and Sarah Jo Szambelan, *Future-Proof Water* (San Francisco, CA: SPUR, 2013), pp. 31. <https://www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2013-03-18/future-proof-water>.

² Laura Tam and Sarah Jo Szambelan, *Fossil-Free Bay Area: A Cleaner Future for the Region's Energy* (San Francisco, CA: SPUR, 2016), pp. 51. <https://www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2016-09-21/fossil-free-bay-area>.

Company's ratepayers. Second, distributed recycled water systems should be connected to and well-integrated with the centralized distribution system for recycled water to the greatest extent possible.

In the long run, we encourage Google and San Jose Water to work together to explore the possibility of the Downtown West recycled water system exporting treated excess recycled water to the centralized system. Creating a synergistic relationship between distributed and centralized water systems would be a pioneering next step in water resilience, if it can be done safely. It is of course paramount that any recycled water entering the system meet necessary water quality standards. This sort of two-way relationship between distributed and centralized systems is common in energy, both for solar and biogas energy, but has not yet been pioneered in the water sector.

SPUR urges San José to continue its world-class track record on sustainability and resilience by developing a portfolio of small, medium, and large-scale recycled water and energy systems for the city.

If you have any questions, please contact Laura Feinstein at lfeinstein@spur.org.

Sincerely,

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