



# CITY OF CORONADO

## CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

April 4, 2023

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### **ESTABLISH AN AD HOC CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON CROSS BORDER WATER POLLUTION**

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Establish an ad hoc City Council Subcommittee on Cross Border Water Pollution for a duration of one year and appoint two members from the Coronado City Council.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Cross border water pollution is a persistent challenge with ongoing impacts to the City of Coronado. Inadequate and dilapidated wastewater infrastructure serving the growing city of Tijuana, Mexico has led to reduced ocean water quality and ocean water closures in the near-border cities of Imperial Beach and Coronado.

For years, and with particular intensity in the past five years, Coronado officials have actively advocated for mechanisms to address the sources of water pollution and improve the ocean water quality. These efforts have included the engagement of professional federal advocacy services, repeated advocacy meetings and visits with Coronado's federal delegation, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials, International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) officials, State legislators, the National League of Cities, and local officials and partners. This determined advocacy is credited with helping to advance a substantial EPA program to address wastewater systems on the U.S. and Mexico sides of the border.

The EPA's comprehensive plan to address cross border water pollution is a \$600 million package of projects ranging from the rebuild of a defunct Mexican wastewater treatment plant to increasing the capacity of advanced treatment at the IBWC wastewater plant on the U.S. side of the border (see Attachment 1). In 2020, \$300 million in federal funds were appropriated for the first phase of projects. The Mexican government pledged \$147 million for wastewater system improvement projects.

Most recently, Coronado officials held over a dozen meetings with U.S. Senators, Congressmembers and staff to urge legislation to correctly align the \$300 million in federal funding with the appropriate lead agency for the first phase of projects. This successful effort demonstrated the importance of Coronado's ongoing engagement to impress the urgency of the problem and need for swift delivery of projects and sufficient future funding.

#### **ANALYSIS:**

The elevated importance of ocean water quality for Coronado merits a serious commitment of effort by City officials. Continuous advocacy is necessary for monitoring of projects and appropriation of future funding, as an additional \$200-300 million is estimated to complete the comprehensive set of projects.

To bring focused attention from the City of Coronado, the City Council is asked to establish an ad hoc subcommittee on Cross Border Water Pollution. The subcommittee, installed with two members of the City Council and supported by City staff and the City's federal advocates, is

proposed to monitor, track and advocate for projects and solutions to cross border water pollution. The subcommittee would conduct advocacy meetings and visits with pertinent federal, state and local officials, nationwide and statewide organizations, and will include travel to Washington, DC and Mexico, as needed. The subcommittee would collaborate with other local officials including the City of Imperial Beach which is greatly affected by water pollution and committed to advocacy efforts.

In addition, the subcommittee is proposed to engage with regional entities about water quality testing and ocean water closures. In the summer of 2022, changes were made to the County of San Diego's water quality testing paradigm. The new testing, promised to produce more rapid results, also prompted much more frequent ocean water closures, which was not an anticipated outcome as the old and new testing systems were represented to be aligned. Mid-summer, alterations in the County's closure system tempered the number of ocean water closures, yet questions remain about the calibration of this first-in-the-nation test. For the best environmental, public access and public health outcomes, dedicated effort with the County and local cities on this testing paradigm is needed.

The subcommittee is proposed to convene for one year from the date of its first meeting. The subcommittee would report back to the City Council with progress updates.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The ad hoc Council Subcommittee may incur expenses related to advocacy-related travel and meetings, which are expected to be met within existing budget authority.

**ALTERNATIVE:**

The City Council could choose not to create an ad hoc City Council Subcommittee.

**CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT:**

Not Applicable.

**PUBLIC NOTICE:**

No notice required.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Status Update on Tijuana River Infrastructure April 2023

Submitted By: City Manager's Office / Tina Friend