



March 3, 2009

Honorable Ann Caen, President  
San Francisco Public Utilities Commission  
1155 Market St., 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94103

President Caen and Commissioners,

Daniel Burnham once said “make no small plans, for they do not have power to stir men’s souls.” We are writing to tell you that it appears that the Sewer System Master Plan (SSMP), which is nearing the end of a three-year planning process, fails to take this advice. We ask that you correct this.

Throughout the course of the planning process, water advocates, the general public, and elected leaders have consistently demanded that the SSMP not only take the necessary steps to repair our wastewater system but lay out a vision that reflects San Francisco’s environmental values. In 2007 SWAle produced the attached report, *Seven Goals for the SSMP*, to guide the planning process in achieving that vision and until as recently as two months ago it appeared that, while imperfect, the SSMP would make significant progress towards those fulfilling those goals. Unfortunately, it now seems otherwise.

At the February meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee’s (CAC) Wastewater Subcommittee staff released a plan summary showing the scope of the SSMP to be dramatically scaled back. What was to be an expansive vision to transform our wastewater from a burden to a resource has essentially become an enhanced repair and replace program and sewer management plan with an undefined low-impact development component. While we support a robust maintenance program, it neither constitutes a Master Plan nor reflects the overwhelming public sentiment for moving the system into a new direction.

The ostensible reason for the dramatic reduction in scope and vision is cost. We are sensitive to this concern and do not seek to understate its importance. However it should not be the principal driver for planning. Rather, we believe that the SSMP should reflect a vision that reflects our shared values of enhancing the bay, ensuring environmental justice, and valuing water as the priceless resource that it is. Putting cost as the overarching planning priority unnecessarily constrains the plan and ultimately shortchanges its intent. It effectively cuts the plan off at the knees.

We urge you to get the SSMP back on course. Instead of leading with cost, lead with the vision that the public has articulated over the past three years. Once that vision is memorialized in a long range plan, then begin the work of determining implementation priorities and navigating the fiscal landscape. This long-range thinking is all the more important as we enter an era where the Federal government once again values investment in our infrastructure and common assets, a marked change from the past generation.

We are currently reviewing the summary and developing a detailed critique based on the *Seven Goals* report and will provide you with it upon completion. In the meantime, we urge you to direct staff to take a step back from the plan, re-evaluate it from a broader perspective, and make the necessary changes to more accurately reflect San Francisco’s values along with the challenges and opportunities posed by the times in which we live.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Clary  
Co-Chair

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