

Westlands Water District Board of Directors

Regular Board Meeting of October 20, 2026

Item 6b

Subject:

Westlands Community Benefits Agreement Plan Update on Community Outreach and Governance Structures

Strategic Plan Key Strategies:

1. Protect Central Valley Project (CVP) Contract and Secure Supplemental Water Supplies
2. Enhance Groundwater Resources
3. Prioritize Critical Infrastructure Needs
4. Evaluate Adaptive Land Use Strategies
5. Cultivate Collaborative Relationships

Discussion:

The purpose of this item is for the Board of Directors (Board) to receive an update on community outreach activities and an overview of potential governance structures for the Community Benefits Agreement Plan (CBAP) required under Assembly Bill (AB) 2661. No selection of a governance structure is requested at this meeting.

Project Background

In December 2025, the Board approved the Valley Clean Infrastructure Plan (VCIP) Master Plan and Programmatic Environmental Impact Report pursuant to AB 2661 (Resolution No. 123-25). AB 2661 requires the District to establish a CBAP for the VCIP and related transmission and generation constructed pursuant to Water Code section 37860. The CBAP must ensure that “local communities,” defined as counties, cities, and other local governmental agencies within or adjacent to the District’s boundaries, have meaningful opportunities to participate and access VCIP benefits (Water Code § 37861(b), (d)). The CBAP must outline specific benefits, which may include job creation and training programs for local residents, use of local businesses and vendors, and financial contributions to community development projects and programs (Water Code §

37861(c)). Availability of associated funding under the CBAP is not expected until the **date of VCIP commercial operation** which is **at least** 60 months away and will continue/buildout in phases thereafter.

Staff continues to conduct outreach and activities based on Board Resolution No. 119-24 (Attachment 1), which outlines the District's approach for development and implementation of the CBAP. Below is a brief overview of both the status of the District's community outreach activities and the potential governance options identified to date by staff. The community outreach activities have informed both potential governance options and specific benefits that would be meaningful to local communities and that may be ultimately identified in the CBAP.

Community Outreach Update

A community benefits agreement is intended to ensure that Fresno County westside communities share in the economic and social benefits of VCIP development. By establishing clear, enforceable commitments among project developers, the District, and local communities, the CBAP will address community priorities through measures such as local hiring and workforce training, opportunities for local businesses and vendors, investments in infrastructure and community programs, and transparent oversight of funding and performance. In doing so, the CBAP will help align clean energy development with local needs, build public trust, and promote equitable, long-term benefits for communities affected by the project.

Community engagement and a needs assessment are a significant part of the process and expected to occur in several phases with multiple meetings for each phase. Scoping this segment of the process is occurring through working groups, which include the local communities and community benefit organizations.

Community Engagement and Needs Assessment

Westlands has completed or will perform community engagement and needs assessment through its consultants Vista Consulting (Vista), J Wallin Opinion Research (Wallin), and Cardo Public Affairs (Cardo). In early September, Vista and Wallin engaged in focus group meetings in English and Spanish with elected officials, high ranking public employees, community advocacy groups, and resident leaders. During

these roundtable discussions, the participants provided their opinions on community needs, concerns with renewable energy development, highest priority issues impacting westside communities, and desirable outcomes resulting from the CBAP. Wallin will also conduct a phone survey and target 300 responses from westside residents within and adjacent to the VCIP service area. On a parallel track, Cardo will conduct traditional style community and resident meetings to gather similar input from people that live within or near the VCIP service area. These meetings will occur over the next few months, but dates have not been set.

In addition to the engagement described above, Westlands conducts and participates in meetings with several community advocacy groups and educators to gather input for the CBAP. These groups include Rural Communities Rising, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, UC Merced, Rural Communities Rising, Central California Environmental Justice Network, Fresno Building Healthy Communities, and Lawyers for Good Government. Westlands engages in weekly communication with one or more of these groups to provide VCIP status information.

Westside Subbasin Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (Westside MLRP)

The Westside MLRP Community Outreach and Engagement Plan laid out the approach for outreach and engagement for the Westside MLRP. The Westside MLRP aims to manage the Westside Subbasin sustainably through the implementation of alternative land uses, specifically less water-intensive uses that also provide drought resiliency, community health, economic wellbeing, water supply, habitat, and climate benefits. Outreach activities were coordinated by the Westside MLRP Partners and Outreach Advisory Committee. Westside MLRP Partners and Collaborators include: Westlands Water District, CeresCollab, The Latino Equity Advocacy & Policy (LEAP) Institute, Linguistica Interpretation and Translation, LLC., Sequoia Riverlands Trust, and Vista Consulting. EKI Environment & Water Inc. (EKI) is the technical consultant developing the Multibenefit Agricultural Lands Repurposing Plan. The input and engagement gathered for the Community Outreach and Engagement Plan will be used to inform the CBAP. The MLRP community tracker summary is provided in Attachment 2.

Preliminary Themes and Findings Based on Initial Results

Water and agricultural employment were central concerns about the region's future. Residents and leaders are concerned that renewable energy projects will drive agricultural jobs from the area. Rising electricity bills are very difficult to afford and residents are choosing between paying rent or mortgages or their PG&E bills. Expanding solar development has not delivered the savings to local residents participants expected.

Governance Options

In addition to the community outreach efforts above, staff has been exploring potential governance options that would allow for effective implementation and oversight of the CBAP under AB 2661.

Option 1: The District Administers the Community Benefits Agreements

- The District could directly administer the Community Benefits Agreement Plan, building a staffing framework internally to manage the program.
- Considerations: Retains direct control with the District, with Board regulations specifying each component of VCIP's contribution, including how "meaningful opportunities to participate" are provided. Engagement with local agencies could be accomplished by entering into a memorandum of understanding or interagency agreements with each one. This option has the highest administrative burden, though the District could contract out discrete functions or rely on consultants.

Option 2: Fresno County Administers the CBAP

- The District could collaborate with Fresno County on administration of the CBAP for unincorporated areas within the District's boundaries, with a Citizens Advisory Committee, and specific benefits to potentially include community development infrastructure, services, and economic development programs.
- Considerations: This option could reduce administrative work for the District administrative and could allow for coordination with County VCIP approvals. However, AB 2661 defines "local communities" to include cities and other local governmental agencies within or adjacent to the District's boundaries. Further

discussion would be needed to understand how Fresno County administration would extend to and include cities and local agencies.

Option 3: Joint Powers Authority with the County and Local Agencies

- The District could form a joint powers authority (JPA) under Government Code section 6500 et seq. with the County, cities, and other local agencies to administer community benefits agreements (CBAs). This option would confer power and responsibility for administration on the JPA, which would be formed as a separate legal entity from its members with a board of directors that could include representatives from each member agency.
- Considerations: Durable, shared governing body made up of AB 2661 “local communities” that would share the administrative work and be representative of and accountable to local communities. However, this option would entail setup time and cost, and potentially difficult governance decisions, for the District and/or member agencies that elect to participate.

Option 4: The District Forms a Community Services District

- The District could form a new, or reorganizes into, a Community Services District coextensive with VCIP through the local agency formation commission (LAFCO) process under the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, which would be responsible for CBAP governance and implementation.
- Considerations: Broad community-service powers associated with a community services district and separation from the District if forming a new district. However, the LAFCO process is time-intensive, requires elections, public hearings, and County and other agency support. It may also be ended by majority protest.

Option 5: Experienced Outside Nonprofit Entity Manages Community Benefits

- An experienced entity such as Citizens Energy could administer the CBAP, with the District being represented in the governance structure. Citizens Energy has experience managing similar community benefits agreement programs for transmission infrastructure where it acquires an interest in the transmission and contributes a significant portion of its returns to fund community benefits. In addition,

Citizen Energy could manage and administer any future contributions under the CBAP.

- Considerations: Experienced administrator, reduces District management work load, and a defined funding plan. A commercial deal would have to be reached with Citizen Energy and approved by the Board. Citizens Energy programs administered for transmission elsewhere in California have historically involved stakeholders beyond the “local communities” outlined in AB 2661.

Option 6: The District Forms or Selects a Qualifying Nonprofit

- A new or existing nonprofit could administer a VCIP Community Fund funded by developer contributions. A newly formed nonprofit could be headed by a board of directors composed of District representatives and leaders from the local communities.
- Considerations: Independent, durable, flexible fund with less District administrative support. However, startup administration would be lengthy and costly, directors owe duties to the nonprofit, and oversight would be needed to ensure benefits reach “local communities” as defined in AB 2661.

Option 7: Regulations Requiring Each Developer to Enter into a CBA Directly with One or More Local Communities

- The District could adopt regulations requiring each VCIP participant to sign a community benefits agreement with one or more host governments. The regulations could set minimum terms (e.g., a template with payment floors and local-hire and local-vendor goals); the District would confirm that agreements have been executed and enforce any instance of non-compliance with its regulations.
- Considerations: Tested model for solar generation (e.g., the California Energy Commission’s Opt-In program, under which developers are required, as a condition of participation, to enter into a community benefits agreement with an eligible entity). Reduces administrative work on the District in some respects because local communities would contract directly with developers and the transmission owner. However, this option would require the District to monitor compliance.

**Note: These options are nonexhaustive, and the District may consider hybrid structures that combine elements of the options above.*

Staff recommends continuing to complete the outreach activities described above and initiating outreach on proposed governance options to local communities and other interested parties at an upcoming workshop.

Proposed Motion:

None.

Recommendation:

Direct staff to complete the outreach activities and initiate outreach related to the proposed governance options, including inviting proposals and scheduling a workshop to explore the governance options further.

Attachments:

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Proposed Motion:

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In addition to the engagement described above, Westlands conducts and participates in meetings with several community advocacy groups and educators to gather input for the CBAP. These groups include Rural Communities Rising, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, UC Merced, Rural Communities Rising, Central California Environmental Justice Network, Fresno Building Healthy Communities, and Lawyers for Good Government. Westlands engages in weekly communication with one or more of these groups to provide VCIP status information.

Westside Subbasin Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (Westside MLRP)

The Westside MLRP Community Outreach and Engagement Plan laid out the approach for outreach and engagement for the Westside MLRP. The Westside MLRP aims to manage the Westside Subbasin sustainably through the implementation of alternative land uses, specifically less water-intensive uses that also provide drought resiliency, community health, economic wellbeing, water supply, habitat, and climate benefits. Outreach activities were coordinated by the Westside MLRP Partners and Outreach Advisory Committee. Westside MLRP Partners and Collaborators include: Westlands Water District, CeresCollab, The Latino Equity Advocacy & Policy (LEAP) Institute, Linguistica Interpretation and Translation, LLC., Sequoia Riverlands Trust, and Vista Consulting. EKI Environment & Water Inc. (EKI) is the technical consultant developing the Multibenefit Agricultural Lands Repurposing Plan. The input and engagement gathered for the Community Outreach and Engagement Plan will be used to inform the CBAP. The MLRP community tracker summary is provided in Attachment 2.

Preliminary Themes and Findings Based on Initial Results

Water and agricultural employment were central concerns about the region's future. Residents and leaders are concerned that renewable energy projects will drive agricultural jobs from the area. Rising electricity bills are very difficult to afford and residents are choosing between paying rent or mortgages or their PG&E bills. Expanding solar development has not delivered the savings to local residents participants expected.

Governance Options

In addition to the community outreach efforts above, staff has been exploring potential governance options that would allow for effective implementation and oversight of the CBAP under AB 2661.

Option 1: The District Administers the Community Benefits Agreements

- The District could directly administer the Community Benefits Agreement Plan, building a staffing framework internally to manage the program.
- Considerations: Retains direct control with the District, with Board regulations specifying each component of VCIP's contribution, including how "meaningful opportunities to participate" are provided. Engagement with local agencies could be accomplished by entering into a memorandum of understanding or interagency agreements with each one. This option has the highest administrative burden, though the District could contract out discrete functions or rely on consultants.

Option 2: Fresno County Administers the CBAP

- The District could collaborate with Fresno County on administration of the CBAP for unincorporated areas within the District's boundaries, with a Citizens Advisory Committee, and specific benefits to potentially include community development infrastructure, services, and economic development programs.
- Considerations: This option could reduce administrative work for the District administrative and could allow for coordination with County VCIP approvals. However, AB 2661 defines "local communities" to include cities and other local governmental agencies within or adjacent to the District's boundaries. Further

discussion would be needed to understand how Fresno County administration would extend to and include cities and local agencies.

Option 3: Joint Powers Authority with the County and Local Agencies

- The District could form a joint powers authority (JPA) under Government Code section 6500 et seq. with the County, cities, and other local agencies to administer community benefits agreements (CBAs). This option would confer power and responsibility for administration on the JPA, which would be formed as a separate legal entity from its members with a board of directors that could include representatives from each member agency.
- Considerations: Durable, shared governing body made up of AB 2661 “local communities” that would share the administrative work and be representative of and accountable to local communities. However, this option would entail setup time and cost, and potentially difficult governance decisions, for the District and/or member agencies that elect to participate.

Option 4: The District Forms a Community Services District

- The District could form a new, or reorganizes into, a Community Services District coextensive with VCIP through the local agency formation commission (LAFCO) process under the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, which would be responsible for CBAP governance and implementation.
- Considerations: Broad community-service powers associated with a community services district and separation from the District if forming a new district. However, the LAFCO process is time-intensive, requires elections, public hearings, and County and other agency support. It may also be ended by majority protest.

Option 5: Experienced Outside Nonprofit Entity Manages Community Benefits

- An experienced entity such as Citizens Energy could administer the CBAP, with the District being represented in the governance structure. Citizens Energy has experience managing similar community benefits agreement programs for transmission infrastructure where it acquires an interest in the transmission and contributes a significant portion of its returns to fund community benefits. In addition,

Citizen Energy could manage and administer any future contributions under the CBAP.

- Considerations: Experienced administrator, reduces District management work load, and a defined funding plan. A commercial deal would have to be reached with Citizen Energy and approved by the Board. Citizens Energy programs administered for transmission elsewhere in California have historically involved stakeholders beyond the “local communities” outlined in AB 2661.

Option 6: The District Forms or Selects a Qualifying Nonprofit

- A new or existing nonprofit could administer a VCIP Community Fund funded by developer contributions. A newly formed nonprofit could be headed by a board of directors composed of District representatives and leaders from the local communities.
- Considerations: Independent, durable, flexible fund with less District administrative support. However, startup administration would be lengthy and costly, directors owe duties to the nonprofit, and oversight would be needed to ensure benefits reach “local communities” as defined in AB 2661.

Option 7: Regulations Requiring Each Developer to Enter into a CBA Directly with One or More Local Communities

- The District could adopt regulations requiring each VCIP participant to sign a community benefits agreement with one or more host governments. The regulations could set minimum terms (e.g., a template with payment floors and local-hire and local-vendor goals); the District would confirm that agreements have been executed and enforce any instance of non-compliance with its regulations.
- Considerations: Tested model for solar generation (e.g., the California Energy Commission’s Opt-In program, under which developers are required, as a condition of participation, to enter into a community benefits agreement with an eligible entity). Reduces administrative work on the District in some respects because local communities would contract directly with developers and the transmission owner. However, this option would require the District to monitor compliance.

**Note: These options are nonexhaustive, and the District may consider hybrid structures that combine elements of the options above.*

Staff recommends continuing to complete the outreach activities described above and initiating outreach on proposed governance options to local communities and other interested parties at an upcoming workshop.

Proposed Motion:

None.

Recommendation:

Direct staff to complete the outreach activities and initiate outreach related to the proposed governance options, including inviting proposals and scheduling a workshop to explore the governance options further.

Attachments:

1. Board Resolution No. 119-24
2. MLRP Community Engagement Tracking Spreadsheet

Westlands Water District Board of Directors

Regular Board Meeting of October 20, 2026

Item 6b

Subject:

Westlands Community Benefits Agreement Plan Update on Community Outreach and Governance Structures

Strategic Plan Key Strategies:

1. Protect Central Valley Project (CVP) Contract and Secure Supplemental Water Supplies
2. Enhance Groundwater Resources
3. Prioritize Critical Infrastructure Needs
4. Evaluate Adaptive Land Use Strategies
5. Cultivate Collaborative Relationships

Discussion:

The purpose of this item is for the Board of Directors (Board) to receive an update on community outreach activities and an overview of potential governance structures for the Community Benefits Agreement Plan (CBAP) required under Assembly Bill (AB) 2661. No selection of a governance structure is requested at this meeting.

Project Background

In December 2025, the Board approved the Valley Clean Infrastructure Plan (VCIP) Master Plan and Programmatic Environmental Impact Report pursuant to AB 2661 (Resolution No. 123-25). AB 2661 requires the District to establish a CBAP for the VCIP and related transmission and generation constructed pursuant to Water Code section 37860. The CBAP must ensure that “local communities,” defined as counties, cities, and other local governmental agencies within or adjacent to the District’s boundaries, have meaningful opportunities to participate and access VCIP benefits (Water Code § 37861(b), (d)). The CBAP must outline specific benefits, which may include job creation and training programs for local residents, use of local businesses and vendors, and financial contributions to community development projects and programs (Water Code §

37861(c)). Availability of associated funding under the CBAP is not expected until the **date of VCIP commercial operation** which is **at least** 60 months away and will continue/buildout in phases thereafter.

Staff continues to conduct outreach and activities based on Board Resolution No. 119-24 (Attachment 1), which outlines the District's approach for development and implementation of the CBAP. Below is a brief overview of both the status of the District's community outreach activities and the potential governance options identified to date by staff. The community outreach activities have informed both potential governance options and specific benefits that would be meaningful to local communities and that may be ultimately identified in the CBAP.

Community Outreach Update

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Westlands Water District Board of Directors

Regular Board Meeting of October 20, 2026

Item 6b

Subject:

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The Westside MLRP Community Outreach and Engagement Plan laid out the approach for outreach and engagement for the Westside MLRP. The Westside MLRP aims to manage the Westside Subbasin sustainably through the implementation of alternative land uses, specifically less water-intensive uses that also provide drought resiliency, community health, economic wellbeing, water supply, habitat, and climate benefits. Outreach activities were coordinated by the Westside MLRP Partners and Outreach Advisory Committee. Westside MLRP Partners and Collaborators include: Westlands Water District, CeresCollab, The Latino Equity Advocacy & Policy (LEAP) Institute, Linguistica Interpretation and Translation, LLC., Sequoia Riverlands Trust, and Vista Consulting. EKI Environment & Water Inc. (EKI) is the technical consultant developing the Multibenefit Agricultural Lands Repurposing Plan. The input and engagement gathered for the Community Outreach and Engagement Plan will be used to inform the CBAP. The MLRP community tracker summary is provided in Attachment 2.

Preliminary Themes and Findings Based on Initial Results

Water and agricultural employment were central concerns about the region's future. Residents and leaders are concerned that renewable energy projects will drive agricultural jobs from the area. Rising electricity bills are very difficult to afford and residents are choosing between paying rent or mortgages or their PG&E bills. Expanding solar development has not delivered the savings to local residents participants expected.

Governance Options

In addition to the community outreach efforts above, staff has been exploring potential governance options that would allow for effective implementation and oversight of the CBAP under AB 2661.

Option 1: The District Administers the Community Benefits Agreements

- The District could directly administer the Community Benefits Agreement Plan, building a staffing framework internally to manage the program.
- Considerations: Retains direct control with the District, with Board regulations specifying each component of VCIP's contribution, including how "meaningful opportunities to participate" are provided. Engagement with local agencies could be accomplished by entering into a memorandum of understanding or interagency agreements with each one. This option has the highest administrative burden, though the District could contract out discrete functions or rely on consultants.

Option 2: Fresno County Administers the CBAP

- The District could collaborate with Fresno County on administration of the CBAP for unincorporated areas within the District's boundaries, with a Citizens Advisory Committee, and specific benefits to potentially include community development infrastructure, services, and economic development programs.
- Considerations: This option could reduce administrative work for the District administrative and could allow for coordination with County VCIP approvals. However, AB 2661 defines "local communities" to include cities and other local governmental agencies within or adjacent to the District's boundaries. Further

discussion would be needed to understand how Fresno County administration would extend to and include cities and local agencies.

Option 3: Joint Powers Authority with the County and Local Agencies

- The District could form a joint powers authority (JPA) under Government Code section 6500 et seq. with the County, cities, and other local agencies to administer community benefits agreements (CBAs). This option would confer power and responsibility for administration on the JPA, which would be formed as a separate legal entity from its members with a board of directors that could include representatives from each member agency.
- Considerations: Durable, shared governing body made up of AB 2661 “local communities” that would share the administrative work and be representative of and accountable to local communities. However, this option would entail setup time and cost, and potentially difficult governance decisions, for the District and/or member agencies that elect to participate.

Option 4: The District Forms a Community Services District

- The District could form a new, or reorganizes into, a Community Services District coextensive with VCIP through the local agency formation commission (LAFCO) process under the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, which would be responsible for CBAP governance and implementation.
- Considerations: Broad community-service powers associated with a community services district and separation from the District if forming a new district. However, the LAFCO process is time-intensive, requires elections, public hearings, and County and other agency support. It may also be ended by majority protest.

Option 5: Experienced Outside Nonprofit Entity Manages Community Benefits

- An experienced entity such as Citizens Energy could administer the CBAP, with the District being represented in the governance structure. Citizens Energy has experience managing similar community benefits agreement programs for transmission infrastructure where it acquires an interest in the transmission and contributes a significant portion of its returns to fund community benefits. In addition,

Citizen Energy could manage and administer any future contributions under the CBAP.

- Considerations: Experienced administrator, reduces District management work load, and a defined funding plan. A commercial deal would have to be reached with Citizen Energy and approved by the Board. Citizens Energy programs administered for transmission elsewhere in California have historically involved stakeholders beyond the “local communities” outlined in AB 2661.

Option 6: The District Forms or Selects a Qualifying Nonprofit

- A new or existing nonprofit could administer a VCIP Community Fund funded by developer contributions. A newly formed nonprofit could be headed by a board of directors composed of District representatives and leaders from the local communities.
- Considerations: Independent, durable, flexible fund with less District administrative support. However, startup administration would be lengthy and costly, directors owe duties to the nonprofit, and oversight would be needed to ensure benefits reach “local communities” as defined in AB 2661.

Option 7: Regulations Requiring Each Developer to Enter into a CBA Directly with One or More Local Communities

- The District could adopt regulations requiring each VCIP participant to sign a community benefits agreement with one or more host governments. The regulations could set minimum terms (e.g., a template with payment floors and local-hire and local-vendor goals); the District would confirm that agreements have been executed and enforce any instance of non-compliance with its regulations.
- Considerations: Tested model for solar generation (e.g., the California Energy Commission’s Opt-In program, under which developers are required, as a condition of participation, to enter into a community benefits agreement with an eligible entity). Reduces administrative work on the District in some respects because local communities would contract directly with developers and the transmission owner. However, this option would require the District to monitor compliance.

**Note: These options are nonexhaustive, and the District may consider hybrid structures that combine elements of the options above.*

Staff recommends continuing to complete the outreach activities described above and initiating outreach on proposed governance options to local communities and other interested parties at an upcoming workshop.

Proposed Motion:

None.

Recommendation:

Direct staff to complete the outreach activities and initiate outreach related to the proposed governance options, including inviting proposals and scheduling a workshop to explore the governance options further.

Attachments:

1. Board Resolution No. 119-24
2. MLRP Community Engagement Tracking Spreadsheet

Westlands Water District Board of Directors

Regular Board Meeting of October 20, 2026

Item 6b

Subject:

Westlands Community Benefits Agreement Plan Update on Community Outreach and Governance Structures

Strategic Plan Key Strategies:

1. Protect Central Valley Project (CVP) Contract and Secure Supplemental Water Supplies
2. Enhance Groundwater Resources
3. Prioritize Critical Infrastructure Needs
4. Evaluate Adaptive Land Use Strategies
5. Cultivate Collaborative Relationships

Discussion:

The purpose of this item is for the Board of Directors (Board) to receive an update on community outreach activities and an overview of potential governance structures for the Community Benefits Agreement Plan (CBAP) required under Assembly Bill (AB) 2661. No selection of a governance structure is requested at this meeting.

Project Background

In December 2025, the Board approved the Valley Clean Infrastructure Plan (VCIP) Master Plan and Programmatic Environmental Impact Report pursuant to AB 2661 (Resolution No. 123-25). AB 2661 requires the District to establish a CBAP for the VCIP and related transmission and generation constructed pursuant to Water Code section 37860. The CBAP must ensure that “local communities,” defined as counties, cities, and other local governmental agencies within or adjacent to the District’s boundaries, have meaningful opportunities to participate and access VCIP benefits (Water Code § 37861(b), (d)). The CBAP must outline specific benefits, which may include job creation and training programs for local residents, use of local businesses and vendors, and financial contributions to community development projects and programs (Water Code §

37861(c)). Availability of associated funding under the CBAP is not expected until the **date of VCIP commercial operation** which is **at least** 60 months away and will continue/buildout in phases thereafter.

Staff continues to conduct outreach and activities based on Board Resolution No. 119-24 (Attachment 1), which outlines the District's approach for development and implementation of the CBAP. Below is a brief overview of both the status of the District's community outreach activities and the potential governance options identified to date by staff. The community outreach activities have informed both potential governance options and specific benefits that would be meaningful to local communities and that may be ultimately identified in the CBAP.

Community Outreach Update

A community benefits agreement is intended to ensure that Fresno County westside communities share in the economic and social benefits of VCIP development. By establishing clear, enforceable commitments among project developers, the District, and local communities, the CBAP will address community priorities through measures such as local hiring and workforce training, opportunities for local businesses and vendors, investments in infrastructure and community programs, and transparent oversight of funding and performance. In doing so, the CBAP will help align clean energy development with local needs, build public trust, and promote equitable, long-term benefits for communities affected by the project.

Community engagement and a needs assessment are a significant part of the process and expected to occur in several phases with multiple meetings for each phase. Scoping this segment of the process is occurring through working groups, which include the local communities and community benefit organizations.

Community Engagement and Needs Assessment

Westlands has completed or will perform community engagement and needs assessment through its consultants Vista Consulting (Vista), J Wallin Opinion Research (Wallin), and Cardo Public Affairs (Cardo). In early September, Vista and Wallin engaged in focus group meetings in English and Spanish with elected officials, high ranking public employees, community advocacy groups, and resident leaders. During

these roundtable discussions, the participants provided their opinions on community needs, concerns with renewable energy development, highest priority issues impacting westside communities, and desirable outcomes resulting from the CBAP. Wallin will also conduct a phone survey and target 300 responses from westside residents within and adjacent to the VCIP service area. On a parallel track, Cardo will conduct traditional style community and resident meetings to gather similar input from people that live within or near the VCIP service area. These meetings will occur over the next few months, but dates have not been set.

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Proposed Motion:

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Recommendation:

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Westlands Water District Board of Directors

Regular Board Meeting of October 20, 2026

Item 6b

Subject:

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Item 6b

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- The District could collaborate with Fresno County on administration of the CBAP for unincorporated areas within the District's boundaries, with a Citizens Advisory Committee, and specific benefits to potentially include community development infrastructure, services, and economic development programs.
- Considerations: This option could reduce administrative work for the District administrative and could allow for coordination with County VCIP approvals. However, AB 2661 defines "local communities" to include cities and other local governmental agencies within or adjacent to the District's boundaries. Further

discussion would be needed to understand how Fresno County administration would extend to and include cities and local agencies.

Option 3: Joint Powers Authority with the County and Local Agencies

- The District could form a joint powers authority (JPA) under Government Code section 6500 et seq. with the County, cities, and other local agencies to administer community benefits agreements (CBAs). This option would confer power and responsibility for administration on the JPA, which would be formed as a separate legal entity from its members with a board of directors that could include representatives from each member agency.
- Considerations: Durable, shared governing body made up of AB 2661 “local communities” that would share the administrative work and be representative of and accountable to local communities. However, this option would entail setup time and cost, and potentially difficult governance decisions, for the District and/or member agencies that elect to participate.

Option 4: The District Forms a Community Services District

- The District could form a new, or reorganizes into, a Community Services District coextensive with VCIP through the local agency formation commission (LAFCO) process under the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, which would be responsible for CBAP governance and implementation.
- Considerations: Broad community-service powers associated with a community services district and separation from the District if forming a new district. However, the LAFCO process is time-intensive, requires elections, public hearings, and County and other agency support. It may also be ended by majority protest.

Option 5: Experienced Outside Nonprofit Entity Manages Community Benefits

- An experienced entity such as Citizens Energy could administer the CBAP, with the District being represented in the governance structure. Citizens Energy has experience managing similar community benefits agreement programs for transmission infrastructure where it acquires an interest in the transmission and contributes a significant portion of its returns to fund community benefits. In addition,

Citizen Energy could manage and administer any future contributions under the CBAP.

- Considerations: Experienced administrator, reduces District management work load, and a defined funding plan. A commercial deal would have to be reached with Citizen Energy and approved by the Board. Citizens Energy programs administered for transmission elsewhere in California have historically involved stakeholders beyond the “local communities” outlined in AB 2661.

Option 6: The District Forms or Selects a Qualifying Nonprofit

- A new or existing nonprofit could administer a VCIP Community Fund funded by developer contributions. A newly formed nonprofit could be headed by a board of directors composed of District representatives and leaders from the local communities.
- Considerations: Independent, durable, flexible fund with less District administrative support. However, startup administration would be lengthy and costly, directors owe duties to the nonprofit, and oversight would be needed to ensure benefits reach “local communities” as defined in AB 2661.

Option 7: Regulations Requiring Each Developer to Enter into a CBA Directly with One or More Local Communities

- The District could adopt regulations requiring each VCIP participant to sign a community benefits agreement with one or more host governments. The regulations could set minimum terms (e.g., a template with payment floors and local-hire and local-vendor goals); the District would confirm that agreements have been executed and enforce any instance of non-compliance with its regulations.
- Considerations: Tested model for solar generation (e.g., the California Energy Commission’s Opt-In program, under which developers are required, as a condition of participation, to enter into a community benefits agreement with an eligible entity). Reduces administrative work on the District in some respects because local communities would contract directly with developers and the transmission owner. However, this option would require the District to monitor compliance.

**Note: These options are nonexhaustive, and the District may consider hybrid structures that combine elements of the options above.*

Staff recommends continuing to complete the outreach activities described above and initiating outreach on proposed governance options to local communities and other interested parties at an upcoming workshop.

Proposed Motion:

None.

Recommendation:

Direct staff to complete the outreach activities and initiate outreach related to the proposed governance options, including inviting proposals and scheduling a workshop to explore the governance options further.

Attachments:

1. Board Resolution No. 119-24
2. MLRP Community Engagement Tracking Spreadsheet

Westlands Water District Board of Directors

Regular Board Meeting of October 20, 2026

Item 6b

Subject:

Westlands Community Benefits Agreement Plan Update on Community Outreach and Governance Structures

Strategic Plan Key Strategies:

1. Protect Central Valley Project (CVP) Contract and Secure Supplemental Water Supplies
2. Enhance Groundwater Resources
3. Prioritize Critical Infrastructure Needs
4. Evaluate Adaptive Land Use Strategies
5. Cultivate Collaborative Relationships

Discussion:

The purpose of this item is for the Board of Directors (Board) to receive an update on community outreach activities and an overview of potential governance structures for the Community Benefits Agreement Plan (CBAP) required under Assembly Bill (AB) 2661. No selection of a governance structure is requested at this meeting.

Project Background

In December 2025, the Board approved the Valley Clean Infrastructure Plan (VCIP) Master Plan and Programmatic Environmental Impact Report pursuant to AB 2661 (Resolution No. 123-25). AB 2661 requires the District to establish a CBAP for the VCIP and related transmission and generation constructed pursuant to Water Code section 37860. The CBAP must ensure that “local communities,” defined as counties, cities, and other local governmental agencies within or adjacent to the District’s boundaries, have meaningful opportunities to participate and access VCIP benefits (Water Code § 37861(b), (d)). The CBAP must outline specific benefits, which may include job creation and training programs for local residents, use of local businesses and vendors, and financial contributions to community development projects and programs (Water Code §

37861(c)). Availability of associated funding under the CBAP is not expected until the **date of VCIP commercial operation** which is **at least** 60 months away and will continue/buildout in phases thereafter.

Staff continues to conduct outreach and activities based on Board Resolution No. 119-24 (Attachment 1), which outlines the District's approach for development and implementation of the CBAP. Below is a brief overview of both the status of the District's community outreach activities and the potential governance options identified to date by staff. The community outreach activities have informed both potential governance options and specific benefits that would be meaningful to local communities and that may be ultimately identified in the CBAP.

Community Outreach Update

A community benefits agreement is intended to ensure that Fresno County westside communities share in the economic and social benefits of VCIP development. By establishing clear, enforceable commitments among project developers, the District, and local communities, the CBAP will address community priorities through measures such as local hiring and workforce training, opportunities for local businesses and vendors, investments in infrastructure and community programs, and transparent oversight of funding and performance. In doing so, the CBAP will help align clean energy development with local needs, build public trust, and promote equitable, long-term benefits for communities affected by the project.

Community engagement and a needs assessment are a significant part of the process and expected to occur in several phases with multiple meetings for each phase. Scoping this segment of the process is occurring through working groups, which include the local communities and community benefit organizations.

Community Engagement and Needs Assessment

Westlands has completed or will perform community engagement and needs assessment through its consultants Vista Consulting (Vista), J Wallin Opinion Research (Wallin), and Cardo Public Affairs (Cardo). In early September, Vista and Wallin engaged in focus group meetings in English and Spanish with elected officials, high ranking public employees, community advocacy groups, and resident leaders. During

these roundtable discussions, the participants provided their opinions on community needs, concerns with renewable energy development, highest priority issues impacting westside communities, and desirable outcomes resulting from the CBAP. Wallin will also conduct a phone survey and target 300 responses from westside residents within and adjacent to the VCIP service area. On a parallel track, Cardo will conduct traditional style community and resident meetings to gather similar input from people that live within or near the VCIP service area. These meetings will occur over the next few months, but dates have not been set.

In addition to the engagement described above, Westlands conducts and participates in meetings with several community advocacy groups and educators to gather input for the CBAP. These groups include Rural Communities Rising, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, UC Merced, Rural Communities Rising, Central California Environmental Justice Network, Fresno Building Healthy Communities, and Lawyers for Good Government. Westlands engages in weekly communication with one or more of these groups to provide VCIP status information.

Westside Subbasin Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (Westside MLRP)

The Westside MLRP Community Outreach and Engagement Plan laid out the approach for outreach and engagement for the Westside MLRP. The Westside MLRP aims to manage the Westside Subbasin sustainably through the implementation of alternative land uses, specifically less water-intensive uses that also provide drought resiliency, community health, economic wellbeing, water supply, habitat, and climate benefits. Outreach activities were coordinated by the Westside MLRP Partners and Outreach Advisory Committee. Westside MLRP Partners and Collaborators include: Westlands Water District, CeresCollab, The Latino Equity Advocacy & Policy (LEAP) Institute, Linguistica Interpretation and Translation, LLC., Sequoia Riverlands Trust, and Vista Consulting. EKI Environment & Water Inc. (EKI) is the technical consultant developing the Multibenefit Agricultural Lands Repurposing Plan. The input and engagement gathered for the Community Outreach and Engagement Plan will be used to inform the CBAP. The MLRP community tracker summary is provided in Attachment 2.

Preliminary Themes and Findings Based on Initial Results

Water and agricultural employment were central concerns about the region's future. Residents and leaders are concerned that renewable energy projects will drive agricultural jobs from the area. Rising electricity bills are very difficult to afford and residents are choosing between paying rent or mortgages or their PG&E bills. Expanding solar development has not delivered the savings to local residents participants expected.

Governance Options

In addition to the community outreach efforts above, staff has been exploring potential governance options that would allow for effective implementation and oversight of the CBAP under AB 2661.

Option 1: The District Administers the Community Benefits Agreements

- The District could directly administer the Community Benefits Agreement Plan, building a staffing framework internally to manage the program.
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Proposed Motion:

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