

AROMAS WATER DISTRICT

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Independent Special Districts are sanctioned under California Law for the performance of local governmental functions within specialized boundaries to serve a common community of interest.

There are two types of special districts: Independent and Dependent. Districts can be further subdivided into Enterprise (Fee based revenue) and Non-Enterprise (Tax based revenue). The Aromas Water District is an Independent Enterprise District. Dependent special districts are administrative extensions of cities and counties. They depend upon another unit of government for their existence. Independent special districts are separate local agencies created by local petition or through popular election. Independent special districts are directly accountable to their constituents.

Districts are governed by boards of directors, elected or appointed to fixed terms and are directly accountable to the public. Boards are subject to initiative, referendum, recall, the Brown Act and other related public agency statutes. Directors must be registered voters and reside within the service area of the district.

BOARD MEETINGS

In order to conduct the district's business and provide adequate opportunities for public input and objective dialogue between directors before reaching decisions, the district board, with the assistance of staff, need to meet regularly in an open public forum.. The public should be encouraged to attend board meetings and feel free to express opinions and issues of concern to their elected officials.

Brown Act Requirements

The Ralph M Brown Act delineates the procedures for the conducting of Public Agency meetings. The user's guide book entitled Open & Public III is available in the district office for any questions which need clarification.

The Brown Act requires the district board follow a clear set of regulations that are intended to ensure the public's rights. Guidelines are given for notice of regular business meetings, special meetings, closed session, agenda items, serial meetings, public comment, confidentiality, to name only a few. It is highly recommended that each Board member become familiar with this Act.

SPECIAL DISTRICTS

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PUBLIC AGENCY PERSONNEL

Basic Responsibilities of Individual Directors:

- To be familiar with the laws governing the district and to obey those laws
- To understand the nature of the water service business
- To understand the nature of the organizational design
- To maintain regular attendance at the board meetings
- To support decisions made by board
- To refrain from involvement in day-to-day operations
- To actively participate in board appointed committees
- To be familiar with district financing
- To be an ambassador of the district accurately supporting district issues and concerns
- To practice open and timely communications
- To be familiar with policies governing the operation of the district

Limitations of Individual Director Authority:

- Individual directors do not have authority to encumber district funds or enter contracts without express consent of the entire board
- Individual board members do not have the authority to direct, assign, order or supervise staff without the express consent of the entire board.
- Individual directors have no special prerogatives or privileges

Basic Roles and Responsibilities of the Board:

- To ensure district staff complies with applicable State and Federal mandates
- Define critical issues
- Develop a Mission Statement
- Develop a Strategic Plan to serve the district's mission
- Steward district property - asset preservation
- Steward the district's finances and affairs:
- Monitor progress towards reaching established goals
- Adheres to the District's organization chart

- Develop policies which:
 - Define responsibilities and eliminate ambiguities
 - Provides organizational direction and guidance
 - Insures that district business is conducted in compliance with applicable laws, statutes, regulations, codes, etc.
- Develop a list of qualifications, job description and evaluation process for the General Manager

Failure to establish an effective leadership team can sometimes be traced to individual directors who may:

- Misunderstand their roles, work outside their roles
- Make decisions based upon political expedience
- Desire safer, short term success in favor of long term solutions
- Micro-manage
- Lack knowledge of the water service
- Lack competence
- Fail to communicate
- Have personal goals other than District goals and/or private agendas

Basic Roles and Responsibilities of the General Manager

- ❑ Oversees implementation of strategic plan decisions
- ❑ Educates, informs and communicates important information to the board- both positive and negative
- ❑ Keeps abreast of all political, legal and technological changes that may impact the district
- ❑ Oversees the management of daily operations
- ❑ Develops and recommends policy
- ❑ Staff oversight - hire, evaluate, promote and discipline
- ❑ Analyzes needs and develops an annual budget
- ❑ Controls resources
- ❑ Serves as one of the district's ambassadors and as a liaison to the public
- ❑ Provides organizational leader
- ❑ Cultivates interagency and intergovernmental relationships
- ❑ Tracks and preserves the district's assets

Failure to establish an effective leaders traced to managers who:

- ❑ Don't share information with the board
- ❑ Don't recognize the individual and collective contribution to be made by individual directors
- ❑ Don't ask for ongoing evaluations of performance and expectations
- ❑ View directors as a roadblock to organizational success as opposed to partners in organizational development
- ❑ Don't recognize the importance of understanding the political/professional dynamic

Districts not having an effective leadership team will most likely find failures related to a combination of both the director(s) and the manager not working within their established roles.

Within this team, individual directors and the general manager must come to terms on the empowerment issue. Who is in charge, who has authority and who has responsibility? Through delegation of power and authority clearly defined within Board policy, the General Manager is empowered to function as both a leader and a manager. Individual directors must be willing to accept that the role of the Board is to lead- not to manage.

Successful districts must blend the political concerns brought by the public officials, operational needs of the system with the economic realities of the district. Political influence on decision making tends to create planning for the low risk, short term as opposed to long term global solutions.