

Guidelines to Core Group Decision Making

FINAL - Approved on May 4, 2000

DEFINITIONS

Core Group Decision or Approval: The Core Group is the decision making body of the Santa Clara Basin Watershed Management Initiative. A Core Group decision or approval means that the action or document can serve as the foundation for moving forward toward accomplishing the Initiative's goals and objectives. A decision can be revisited and changed based on additional knowledge or data (continuous improvement). For the purpose of this document, there are three types of decisions: consensus, conditional approval, and voting method. The Core Group strives to make all decisions by consensus.

Consensus: The Core Group has made a consensus decision if everyone is reasonably satisfied with or has no strong objections to the recommendation or action and will support the decision.

Conditional Approval: A Conditional Approval decision carries with it conditions that, if satisfied, will eventually expire and the decision becomes consensus. This is a transitional decision that should not last more than three months. The conditions must be accepted by the Core Group and be clearly achievable, in concert with the WMI goals, and short-term (three months or less).

Voting Method: A Voting Method decision is a majority-rule decision. As such, this method always results in at least one minority opinion. Together, the majority and the minority opinion(s) represent the Core Group decision. If this method is employed, the majority and minority opinions cannot be used independently to represent the Core Group's position on the issue.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE

1. Invoking Decision Making: Any Core Group member, with another member seconding the proposal, may request a straw vote on an issue. The Chair may call for an official vote. Any member may ask if an issue is ripe for decision making.
2. Straw Vote: The Chair will ask all Core Group members to vote in favor of an issue. For the purpose of a straw vote, any Core Group member present during the voting is eligible to vote. If all voting members vote in favor of the issue, this represents consensus and the decision is made.
3. Consensus Decisions: If the straw vote results in any member voting in opposition to the issue, the Chair will employ one of the following methods to help achieve consensus: define the issues; list areas of agreement and disagreement on a flipchart; off-line discussions; and understand reasons and data. The Chair may also choose to employ any other methods to help achieve consensus that may not be listed. The Core Group has made a consensus decision if everyone is reasonably satisfied with or has no strong objections to the recommendation or action and will support the decision.
4. Conditional Approval: In the event that a Core Group member votes in favor of an issue with certain conditions, the member must demonstrate to the Core Group the conditions are clearly achievable, in concert with the WMI goals, and short-term (can be resolved in three months or less). If the Core Group accepts (i.e., a separate decision) the member's conditions, it may approve a document or action with attached conditions that must be fulfilled. This is considered a "Conditional Approval," and shall be recorded in the minutes with the associated conditions. In addition, the Core Group shall identify

Conditional action items that, if completed, will satisfy the conditions. These action items will include deadlines and be recorded in the minutes. Action items shall be carried over until they are completed to the Core Group's satisfaction. A Conditional Approval decision is temporary and becomes a Consensus decision when all the conditions are satisfied.

5. Voting Method: If no consensus can be reached, the Core Group must choose and employ a voting method. The preferred voting method, assuming that the issue can not be decided by consensus or a conditional decision (as defined above) is Block voting using five interest bubbles (see Attachment 1 for membership in each bubble). In Block voting, each bubble has four votes. Members of the bubble decide how votes will be split. However, all opinions within a bubble should be reflected so at least one vote should be allocated to the minority opinion even if that opinion represents less than 25% of the opinion within the bubble.

A decision needs 16 of the 20 votes (75%) to carry. If there are 16 approving votes but one bubble unanimously opposes the motion (i.e.; all 4 of its votes are no), then the motion carries; however, the dissenting bubble may, at its discretion, write a minority report which becomes part of the WMI decision. In addition, any dissenting members within a bubble may also, at their discretion, write a minority report which becomes part of the WMI decision. Decisions made through bubble voting are considered decisions, not consensus.

The Core Group may, by consensus, choose to use the simple voting method, another method deemed appropriate for the situation, or defer the discussion to the next meeting. Simple voting is defined as: Signatories vote individually; members must be present at a decision meeting to vote and must specifically vote or abstain; a decision needs the vote of 75% of those present to carry.

Report-outs on Core Group decisions reached by any voting method must contain both the decision and any associated minority reports.

1. Minority Reports: Based on the voting method used, Core Group members may create documents on different viewpoints (minority reports) that must be carried throughout the process. The Core Group members advocating the different viewpoint are responsible for writing the minority report(s). Minority reports must be no more than two pages in length and will be a part of the final decision. Minority reports are signed by the respective parties for record keeping and follow-up. The Chair must ensure that minority report(s) are attached to the decision in the official records of the Core Group. In addition, if the decision is not reached by consensus, the Chair should ensure that the section of the minutes discussing the issue and recording the vote is attached to the file as part of the official record. Individual Core Group members must ensure that minority report(s) are presented with the decision when they present it to external groups. A Voting Method decision is final and is not considered consensus.
2. These decision-making guidelines are for the Core Group and all of its subgroups. As noted, these are recommended guidelines and complementary methods may be used if more appropriate in the circumstances. However, methods that are opposed to the guidelines should be approved by the Core Group prior to use.

RESOURCES

Signatory Document

PIT Decision-making Process

TWG Decision-making Documents

BUBBLES FOR DECISION-MAKING VOTING

Local Government

- City of Cupertino
- City of Palo Alto
- City of San Jose
- City of Santa Clara
- City of Sunnyvale
- Santa Clara County
- Santa Clara Valley Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention Program

Environmental/citizen advocacy

- CLEAN South Bay
- League of Women Voters
- Salmon and Steelhead Restoration Group
- Santa Clara County Streams for Tomorrow
- Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society
- Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition
- Western Waters Canoe Club

Regulatory Agencies

- California Department of Fish and Game
- San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US Environmental Protection Agency

Industry/commercial/agriculture

- California Restaurant Association/Dairy Belle Freeze
- Home Builders Association of Northern California
- San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Santa Clara Cattleman's Association
- Santa Clara County Farm Bureau
- Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group

Regional environmental/resource management

- Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District
- San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory
- San Francisquito Creek CRMP
- Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority
- Santa Clara Valley Water District
- Silicon Valley Pollution Prevention Center
- USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service