



**CIVICWELL**

Transforming Local Vision into Action

# Changemakers and Community Impact

*2023 Mid-Year Highlights*

[civicwell.org](https://civicwell.org)

*Historic Whittier Blvd revitalization project in Pico Rivera, CA*

# A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

Dear CivicWell partners and supporters,

In March I joined CivicWell as Chief Executive Officer. In my two decades of work in the public, private, and non-profit sectors in the areas of community development, affordable housing, transportation and health equity, environmental justice, land use planning, and public finance, I have looked to CivicWell as a model of equitable community engagement. I am deeply honored to lead an organization with a decades-long legacy of supporting civic and community partners in achieving their goals around climate resilience, sustainable resource management, social justice, public health, and wellbeing.



Over the past five months, I have met individually with over 40 CivicWell staff members and our 15 Board members—including four new members!—as well as dozens of partners working at the local, regional, state, and national levels. These illuminating discussions inform the strategy I am developing with our leadership team to create a shared vision and a roadmap for the future.

We have much to celebrate already this year. Our convenings draw increasing numbers of attendants from communities, agencies, and companies working toward a resilient future. In March we held our 31st annual Policymakers Conference with 100 elected officials, and last month over 400 people attended the 14th annual California Climate and Energy Forum. This fall we welcome our 10th cohort of CivicSpark Fellows. This group of emerging leaders will join an alumni network that has completed over one million hours in service to communities striving to reach ambitious goals in equity and sustainability. We also enjoyed a number of legislative successes, including the advancement of SB 511 by Senator Blakespear (co-sponsored by CivicWell and Contra Costa County), which would require the state to provide greenhouse gas emissions inventories for jurisdictions that request them.

We draw on these successes as we overcome challenges and welcome new opportunities. CivicWell reaffirms our commitment to provide technical assistance, support capacity building, and facilitate coalition-building for communities seeking to capitalize on historic levels of federal funding in areas like infrastructure and energy. These efforts will be critical to overcome shrinking funding from local, state, and private sector partners impacted by economic setbacks. Even as we focus on funding, we never lose sight of the central objective: to improve community resilience, particularly within communities that face disadvantages due to disinvestment and marginalization. We take these challenges in stride and center diversity, equity, and inclusion as we do so.

As we reach the midpoint of the year, we have taken a moment to highlight just a few of the stories that reflect CivicWell's engagement and impact. Please read on for a glimpse into the work our team is doing every day.

This is an historic time for investment of resources and advancement of policymaking in the areas in which CivicWell has been a leader for over 40 years. It is an honor to lead this team of changemakers and the powerful networks of leaders that we support with our efforts.

*Bernadette Austin*

**Bernadette Austin**  
CEO





## CIVICSPARK

# Going Green with the City of Monterey Park

CivicSpark Fellow Olivia Williams has supported the City of Monterey Park's Going Green initiative to engage the community in climate change mitigation efforts and to create the Citywide Sustainability Plan. This is the first year that Monterey Park has hosted a Fellow from CivicWell's CivicSpark AmeriCorps program.

Since September 2022, Olivia has served over 1200 hours building capacity for the City of Monterey Park by leading an interdepartmental Green Team to increase staff knowledge of climate change issues and implement the Going Green community outreach program.

### Keeping Equity at the Forefront

Monterey Park is a city in the San Gabriel Valley with rich Asian history and culture. The Going Green Sustainability Survey was available in three languages and made accessible in multiple formats to ensure all community members had the opportunity for their ideas to be represented in the City's plan. Additionally, Ms. Williams partnered with the City's Economic Development department to provide survey incentives through its Shop Local rewards program.

### Community Engagement and Input

Ms. Williams hosted booths at seven City events, held five community workshops, and coordinated the City's Earth Day celebration. She analyzed input from over 500 Monterey Park residents on their priorities to create a more sustainable community.

### Next Steps

The City of Monterey Park is using this community input to help create its Citywide Sustainability Plan, which uses a holistic framework to mitigate climate change while promoting environmental equity and community resilience.



*Our CivicSpark Fellow has been an extremely valuable resource for the City's climate change work, by leading the work related to sustainability. The Going Green program brings sustainability to the forefront of conversations within the agency and pushes forward with our decision makers' priority for the community. These efforts would not have been possible without the CivicSpark Fellow's passion and dedication that they bring to the position.*

**BETH CHOW**

Monterey Park Senior Planner



## CLIMATE CHANGE & ENERGY

# Capital Region Climate Readiness Collaborative Event Propels Regional Grant Coordination

The Capital Region Climate Readiness Collaborative (CRCRC), a coalition program of CivicWell, is a multidisciplinary network of local and regional agencies, organizations, businesses and associations working together to advance climate mitigation and adaptation efforts in their own communities and throughout California's Capital Region.

On May 3rd, the CRCRC gathered key agencies and organizations in the Capital Region to identify shared goals, project concepts, and next steps to support effective coordination for advancing the Sacramento area's top climate resilience priorities at the Capital Region Climate Grant Coordination Workshop.

The workshop was held at the Headquarters of SMUD, the nation's sixth-largest community-owned, not-for-profit electric service. Facilitators highlighted four grant opportunities and led conversations encouraging participants to talk through the complexities of each grant opportunity and develop potential project concepts.

### Cultivating Regional Climate Resilience Efforts

The workshop was given high praise among participants who noted that it met a need in the region to begin a more strategic and coordinated approach to applying for grants. Creating more robust and competitive project concepts will put the Capital Region in a position to advance increasingly ambitious climate resilience work.

### Next Steps

CRCRC's grant coordination subcommittee has already begun organizing the Regional Resilience Grant Program project concept that took first place at the workshop. The subcommittee has also taken steps to propel the conversation surrounding more successful grant coordination within the Capitol Region.



*At a time when civic and community organizations could be overwhelmed with state and federal funding opportunities, events like these provide spaces for dialogue and partnership that result in the types of innovative and transformative proposals funders are hoping to see.*

**BERNADETTE AUSTIN**  
CivicWell





## COMMUNITY DESIGN

# Creating a Mixed-Use Destination Corridor in the City of Pico Rivera

CivicWell has partnered with the City of Pico Rivera to transform Historic Whittier Boulevard into a vibrant uptown district. CivicWell helped the City secure a \$332,000 Caltrans Sustainable Communities Grant focused on multimodal improvements along the corridor and Durfee Avenue (the old Main Street) for walking, bicycling, and innovative micro and regional transit. The City added leverage funds, expanding the project to produce a specific plan aimed at converting the Boulevard from a strip commercial arterial dominated by big boxes and parking lots to a walkable, mixed-use destination corridor.

## Gathering Community Input

The project partners, led by Pico Rivera Director of Innovation and Communications Javier Hernandez, with CivicWell, Day One, and MIG consultant team, completed a 5-day charrette that drew ideas from state and congressional leaders, the Mayor and Council Members, agencies, businesses, nonprofits, youth, and the public. Activities were held at the IDEA Lab, a formerly vacant building the City bought and opened for the first time to host the events and showcase the corridor's possibilities.

## Inspiring Events

The partners hosted focus meetings, a photovoice project with 30 youth from the local Boys and Girls Club, a train ride and tour with local elected leaders and advisory group members of Old Town Orange for inspiration, and a Saturday Open House.

## Next Steps

The consultant team is translating the input into design concepts and recommendations for the next phase of community engagement, followed by completion of the Multimodal Plan by end of year and Specific Plan in 2024.



*They can't say [change] can't happen in Pico Rivera, [but] it can!*

**MEMBER**  
Advisory Group

*We're thrilled and honored to serve alongside leaders and residents to create a vision and support implementation of the next phase of storied Whittier Boulevard. This initiative will provide a model for elsewhere in California.*

**JOSH MEYER**  
CivicWell



## POLICY

# Aligning Transportation and Climate Goals

AB 6 and AB 7, authored by Assemblymember Laura Friedman, embody an effort to more closely align local and state transportation investments with the state's climate goals. With the introduction of the bills, Assemblymember Friedman worked with Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg to convene a stakeholder group to address the issues and attempt to develop a consensus approach.

The stakeholders comprise a wide range of interests including environmental and environmental justice organizations, local and regional government entities, construction trade union, construction companies, and home builders, among others. CivicWell Policy Director Roger Dickinson has helped facilitate the stakeholder group and worked closely with Assemblymember Friedman's staff to develop legislative language based on the discussions of the stakeholders.

The diversity of stakeholder viewpoints has made this effort particularly challenging and ongoing. CivicWell has supported the bills, and Dickinson has also testified in support of the bills as they have been heard in legislative committees as the work with the stakeholders continues.

### SB 511 by Senator Catherine Blakespear

CivicWell is co-sponsoring SB 511 with Contra Costa County. The bill would direct the California Air Resources Board to develop and provide greenhouse gas emission inventories to cities and counties that request them. The inventories are essential to support the preparation of Climate Action Plans by cities and counties and to target the investments they make to provide the greatest results and equity.

### Our Policy Work

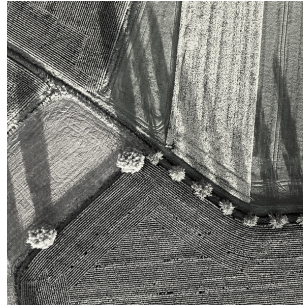
Consistent with our mission and priorities, we undertake advocacy in the state legislature to promote progressive approaches that support local governments on climate, housing, transportation, water, and energy legislation.



*With such a diverse range of interests, the effort to find common ground that harmonizes our transportation and climate priorities presents an enormous challenge. The contribution of CivicWell in this endeavor has been crucial to making meaningful progress.*

**LAURA FRIEDMAN**  
State Assemblymember





## WATER

# Supporting the Underrepresented Communities Technical Assistance Program

CivicWell has helped kick off the Underrepresented Communities Technical Assistance (URC TA) Program. The [URC TA Program](#) is a collaboration of the Water Foundation, CivicWell, Community Water Center, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, Self-Help Enterprises, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, the Nature Conservancy, and the National Audubon Society to increase underrepresented community engagement and capacity in local Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) planning processes. In 2021, the program partners started working with the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) to create formal avenues to address communities' needs as the Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) began their basin management planning efforts. Now in 2023, DWR has increased NGO partner funding from \$2.5 million to \$9 million in order to expand its Technical Assistance offerings.

Over the next two years, the partners will work on well mitigation, provide ecological data, and increase communities' and small farmers' participation in GSA management efforts.

### Program Goals

The goal is to identify and address community needs, risks, and vulnerabilities related to the implementation of groundwater sustainability plans in the Sacramento Valley and San Joaquin Valley. A central objective is to see communities' input and needs included in groundwater sustainability decisions.

### Benefits

The URC TA program will increase equitable involvement, highlight groundwater as a critical piece of a resilient California water portfolio, and address the broader climate impacts on communities and their ecosystems.

### CivicWell Role

CivicWell will coordinate the program partners, support updating and sharing tools and materials, and showcase community success stories to amplify community needs and lessons learned across SGMA basins.



*The URC TA Program is an opportunity to help communities overcome the structural barriers around decision-making related to their groundwater basins, and the TA efforts will contribute to GSAs becoming more responsive to the community needs. Ultimately the goal is to see changes in access to safe drinking water.*

**JUSTINE MASSEY**  
Community Water Center

# 2023 Board of Directors



**Mike Wilson, Chair**  
Supervisor, Humboldt County



**Heidi Hall, Vice-Chair**  
Supervisor, Nevada County



**Das Williams, Secretary/Treasurer**  
Supervisor, Santa Barbara County



**Wendy Root Askew**  
Supervisor, Monterey County



**Soheila Bana**  
Councilmember, City of Richmond



**Tom Butt, Member Emeritus**  
Former Mayor, City of Richmond



**Ronaldo Fierro**  
Councilmember, City of Riverside



**Lucas Frerichs**  
Supervisor, County of Yolo



**Dan Kalb**  
Councilmember, City of Oakland



**Anna Klovstad**  
Councilmember, Town of Truckee



**Daron McDaniel**  
Supervisor, Merced County



**Yasmine-Imani McMorris**  
Vice Mayor, City of Culver City



**Leticia Perez**  
Supervisor, Kern County



**Gabe Quinto**  
Councilmember, City of El Cerrito



**Susan Sonne**  
Councilmember, City of Buena Park