

# City pegs desal cost at \$99M

Desalination - Plan +  
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SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz Water Department laid out a list of major construction projects to upgrade and maintain the system over the next three years estimated to cost more than \$120 million, including \$99 million for a desalination plant.

Water officials presented a three-year capital improvement program to the Water Commission on Monday night.

Commissioners unanimously approved the plan. Commissioner Brent Fouse was absent. The recommendations now go to the City Council.

The nearly \$99 million for design, engineering and construction of a desalination plant is about 40 percent more than estimated when the city began discussing transforming seawater eight years ago.

The high cost of desalination sparked concern from a couple of residents in the audience.

"I didn't dream it would be that much," said Rick Longinotti, a vocal desal critic. "I wonder why it's gone up so much. This is the first time I've seen an estimation of what it will cost for the construction of a desalination plant."

Linette Almond, deputy water director, explained the spike in price,

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saying the additional costs include purchasing land and building infrastructure to deliver water to Soquel Creek Water District — the city's partner in building the plant. The two agencies would share the cost.

"The conceptual level was based on 2002 estimates," Almond said. "A lot has changed in construction since that time. The pilot

study was just for inside-the-fence plant."

Commissioners asked staff several questions to clarify how much has been spent on specific projects and when they will be completed.

"Some of this is just completely unintelligible to me," Commissioner Andy Schiffrin said. "Nothing adds up. It's hard to understand what's going on."

Besides the desal project, one of the biggest, most expensive projects on the list was a \$14 million new tank

at the Bay Street Reservoir, which has been under construction for a few years and taken more time to complete than expected.

Other water improvement projects identified were \$2 million for constructing a new inland monitoring well, known as the Beltz Well, and \$4.3 million for rehabilitating the North Coast system. The North Coast work should begin in May.

The Santa Cruz Water Department supplies water for 90,000 customers from Davenport to Capitola.