

Differences Of Opinion On The Need For Zayante Dam

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Is there a politics of water in Santa Cruz County that is trying to stop area population growth by blocking water projects intended to meet the necessity of people to drink?

Or, is there a compelling ecological reason that is causing hundreds of men and women countywide to battle such water development projects as the proposed Zayante dam and reservoir?

The Santa Cruz City Council is being torn apart philosophically by the opposing viewpoints on whether the Zayante project should go forward.

Analysis

Officially battling the project are the League of Women Voters, the Save San Lorenzo River Association, the Environmental Council and City Councilmen Michael Rotkin and Bruce Van Allen.

Officially supporting continued studies for the project are a City Council majority led by Mayor John Mahaney and Vice Mayor Joseph Ghio, the city Water Department, the City Water Commission and the managers of the Scotts Valley and Soquel water districts.

The City Council has been told by the General Plan Committee, the city Planning Commission, the Water Commission and various engineering firms that a major source of water must be developed by 1985 to meet future demands.

The League of Women Voters contends that alternatives to the dam and reservoir must be explored before a commitment to the big project is made.

The Environmental Council contends that based upon projected per capita consumption of 100 gallons of water per day (a figure alleged to have been provided by the city Water Department) there is no requirement for the Zayante dam and reservoir, that a Tait Street subsurface collector project in the San Lorenzo River will meet whatever extra water is needed after the city's buildout potential is achieved.

Save the San Lorenzo River Association members contend they have searched city documents in vain to find clearcut justification for the Zayante project, estimated to cost \$100 million.

It was The Sentinel that published the report alluded to by the Environmental Council. But there are many questions about this system that Environmental Council members would have heard raised had they attended the Water Commission meetings at which it was discussed.

And at the time the graphic was shown, Allen indicated that the collector system would be at best only a "hold" measure until the Zayante project was on line.

In an unusual letter to a nonconstituent, Mayor John Mahaney recently challenged assumptions made by the Sue Haynes, president of the San Lorenzo River Association, upon which many of the Environmental Council statements appear to be based.

Mahaney, long a supporter of the Zayante project, wrote that one incorrect assumption made by Haynes and her group involves population served by the city water system. "The current population equivalent served is 66,368 persons," Mahaney said. "This number is expected to climb to 79,742 by 1989 and 98,745 by 1999. Population equivalent considers fulltime residents, transients, tourist and motel use, etc."

Mahaney states another wrong assumption is the use of 100 gallons per day per capita as the total water use, including business, industrial, irrigation and agricultural use. "Current data indicates the residential component, including multiple family residential, consumes just about 110 gallons per capita per day. In addition to this use must be added all of the other components. Characteristically, residential use has amounted to about 55 percent of the total use in our service area."

And to a written statement from Haynes that "total requirement for the Santa Cruz Water Department's presently allowed buildout is 8,515 acre feet," Mahaney rebutted: "Your estimate of water requirements at ultimate buildout is only about 2 percent more than was produced in fiscal 1977-78, during our extensive water rationing program. The last year the system used as little as 8,515 acre feet was in fiscal 1968-69, when production was 8,859 acre feet."

Mahaney closed his letter to Haynes with the statement: "I would encourage you to check your data and assumptions a little more carefully in the future with the Department concerned to avoid misunderstanding."

Records show that production in 1977-78 was 8,307 acre feet but that in the eight previous years it was much higher, ranging from 10,794 acre feet in 1969-70 to 12,665 acre feet in 1975-76, just before the drought.

The link-up of water to a stop-growth political activism came at the time Measure O, the so-called Greenbelt Initiative, was written and passed by its advocates. As one way to stop growth in greenbelt lands around the city the city is forbidden to extend water and other services to those lands.

Rotkin and Van Allen were strong supporters of Measure O, while Mahaney and Vice Mayor Joseph Ghio (the other two councilmembers elected at that time) were strongly opposed to it.

But the core issue in the current debate over the Zayante project may not be the philosophical split on the council but the motivations of those opposing the project.

In a recent talk here Dr. Bernard Frieden, author of "The Environmental Hustle," twitted so-called local environmentalists and elsewhere on their use of Mother Nature to stop growth they don't want.

He contended that the environmental activist today considers housing to be an infringement upon nature and uses every conceivable device possible to frustrate those seeking to house an ever-increasing population. To preserve their neighborhoods unchanged, he said, these people claim they are environmentalists, "and someone who six months ago didn't know the difference between an owl and a robin redbreast now opposes growth because of the effect upon wildlife."

The Santa Cruz City Council majority expects to hear much about wildlife in future. But the question is, is the concern real or assumed.

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about water shortages in future. But, is the concern real or assumed?

And what about the people who in the past authorized bond issues for this and other water projects? Does that vote get wiped out by the decision of a latter-day and far from unanimous City Council?

Does the Greenbelt Initiative get wiped out the same way in the future, even though this, too, came about through a vote of the people?

The debate is expected to be lively, beginning Oct. 30, when the City Council conducts a public hearing on the proposed new general plan. This plan calls for development of the Zayante dam and reservoir if environmentally feasible.

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Each of the groups express concern about an earthquake fault near the site.

In discussing the contentions of the three major opposition groups, it has been pointed out by Morris Allen, Santa Cruz water director, and the Water Commission, that only once has any member of the three opposition groups attended a commission meeting to discuss the Zayante project.

Commissioner Mel Calender said Monday, for example: "We are told that we need water but when we try to find water we are criticized by people who never come to our meetings."

Allen told the commissioners: "The voters voted twice on this to give us direction, presumably."

Allen's reference was to bond issues in which the Zayante project was figured. This "go ahead" by voters approving some of the necessary funding has been overlooked by Rotkin in particular, it is believed by some people, because Rotkin has contended often at recent City Council meetings that the city is rushing ahead with a project before the people have determined the project is needed.

It is contentions such as this that have caused some city officials and private citizens to question the real purpose of those striving to block the project. The belief is that the governmental process is a continuum, that it is patently absurd to say the people never approved a project when they did in fact vote money for one. Not the people who are here now, true, but people who were residents at the time and backed up their vote with their monthly payments to the Water Department.

Those favoring the project note that it may take 15 or 20 years to bring a major water source onto line. They contend that because the governmental process is a continuum the votes by the residents of yesteryear are just as binding as were the votes last March which forbid the city to move into designated open space lands until 1990.

Based on the votes of yesteryear the city has spent close to a million dollars on the Zayante project to bring it to the point where, with luck, it can get the project into service by 1990.

There is concern at the City Council level that if just one or two votes are switched at this level the work and expenditures down through the years will be wasted, that the city could indeed face a grave water crisis in the middle 1980s that would parallel the drought crisis of 1977.

The Environmental Council has castigated the city Water Department and the media for releasing alleged erroneous information on the water crisis that could lie ahead if a major water source is not developed to buttress supplies now obtained from Loch Lomond, the river, coastal streams and wells.

In the castigation it is stated that a proposed under-the-river water collection system near Tait Street is shown on a Water Department chart as being all that is needed to meet supply needs until 1995.