

Valley residents want sanitation improvements, but *Sentinel 3/6/83* sewers?

BOULDER CREEK — The idea of public sewers has finally hit home for many San Lorenzo Valley residents.

For years now San Lorenzo Valley Water District directors have held workshops and meetings about plans to clean up valley sanitation. "If we got a dozen people to come to the meetings, we were lucky," Manager Ed Steffani said Friday.

Considerably more than a dozen showed up Thursday at Highlands Park in Ben Lomond for a public hearing held by district directors on a plan for new sewer lines in parts of Felton, Ben Lomond, Boulder Creek and Kings Creek.

About 200 people attended the public hearing which packed the meeting hall to overflowing.

What triggered the large turnout were mailers sent to property owners by the water district, telling them there were plans in the works for new sewer lines to cost about \$25 per month for the owners of some 2,500 parcels.

Many of the property owners told directors the mailer hit them like a

cannonball, that they had no idea such a project was planned for their properties.

The focus of the hearing was for the residents to comment on a draft environmental impact report for the sewer plan.

The deadline for comments was Thursday, but after the hearing water district directors decided to extend the deadline another ten days until March 14.

"They are very interested. They want to learn more. We want to accommodate them," said Steffani. More copies of the bulky environmental report are now available at the Felton, Boulder Creek and Ben Lomond libraries and the water district office in Boulder Creek. For those who do not have the time to read the entire document, a 35-page summary will be available on Monday.

The board also voted to hold an election by mail on the proposed sewer project within 120 days and indicated it may hold two elections. The second election would be held after all the information has been gathered on the project.

Steffani stressed the draft environmental report is only a study. "All we're doing now is finishing a study. The really important decision about whether or not the sewer lines should be built will come later," he said.

He urged residents to "start getting involved now."

The board has scheduled March 14 as the date to consider adoption of the draft environmental impact report so that it can be considered the following day by county supervisors.

A straw vote taken at the public hearing showed only two residents adamantly opposed to the sewer lines. Almost everyone agreed septic tank problems are bad enough that something needs to be done. Many were ready to place their bets on new sewer lines. Others wanted a project, but said sewers aren't the answer.

"It's encouraging to know that at least people were unanimous in knowing it is a problem and wanting to solve it," Steffani.

Washington Way residents in Felton presented directors with a letter giving their support to the sewers, even if it costs \$30 per month.

Others testified about the sanitary problems caused by septic tanks overflow.

Residents testified contamination from sewage has made their babies, children and pets sick. Children play in the septic discharge, they said.

Senior citizens, however, said they could not afford the cost.

One elderly lady telephoned Steffani and told him she could not afford \$1 per month, let alone \$30. She broke down in

tears over the phone.

Steffani said he will do everything he can to find some kind of aid for those who truly cannot afford more monthly bills. "That's the kind of thing federal assistance should take care of," he said.

Residents wondered why certain parcels are targeted for sewer lines and others are not. They were told about a long list of criteria used to determine whether parcels had critical septic problems.

The state Water Resources Control Board has ordered a sanitation cleanup by 1986.

Steffani said even though some property owners don't see evidence of septic tank failure on their properties that does not mean their septic tanks aren't contributing to pollution. For instance, if drainage runs downhill from their properties, they won't notice the smell.

"You don't have to argue with the people who see it," he said.

Water District directors also plan to hold a series of neighborhood meetings. "When we look at it on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis, there may be ways of adjusting the boundaries," said Steffani.