

Special Water Assessment District In RDM In Limbo

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An attempt to form a special water assessment district for fire-plagued areas of Rio del Mar may be reduced almost in half, according to Rio del Mar Improvement Association President Melvin Fields, in order to include only those residents most interested in the proposal.

Fields made his report Monday following an association update by Victor Lauderbach of Bowman and Williams civil engineers. Lauderbach explained the process of residents forming their own special water assessment district.

The area in question involves the ridge off Rio del Mar Boulevard; between Clubhouse Drive and Highway 1. Lack of water and insufficient water lines and booster power to the 400-foot elevation area has partially contributed to two homes being destroyed by fire last year.

Parcel owners are being asked to form the district by paying an estimated \$2,000 each for improvements. It is projected to be spread over 15 years at a cost of about \$200 a year, including interest.

At least 60 percent approval is needed from area residents to get the process off the ground and before the Soquel Creek County Water District.

Fields reported that interest concerning the special district is high in the south-central portion of the area which includes Vista Del Mar, Cresta Vista and Cuesta. Of the 120 signatures collected so far, he estimated the above areas were approaching the 60 percent figure.

The problem, however, he explained, is with the northern area residents on Loma Prieta Drive and above. Because of this, he added, "We might be able to reduce the special district and include only the areas below Loma Prieta."

Directors, led by Bob Curtiss and a host of resident volunteers, will continue gathering signatures. Fields said he would

discuss the possibility of reducing the district with Bob Johnson, district manager of the water district.

Johnson has given a "guesstimate" of between \$800,000 and \$1.2 million for water improvements in the area.

The biggest question, brought up by directors Clayton Ward, Curtiss and Fields, involved whether residents would be reimbursed monies from the district if they decide to go ahead and pay for the improvements now. The water district does have the improvements scheduled in its capital improvements program. However, Johnson told directors at an earlier meeting it could be 1985 to 1990 or longer before they are completed.

If residents form the special district and make improvements now, said Fields, "they should get some pre-commitment for reimbursement from the water district."

He added the district would be saving money by getting the improvements done earlier and at today's prices.

Lauderbach replied that any reimbursement would be up to the water district board.

He explained individual properties within the special proposed district would be assessed the same amount, no matter what the size. However, if larger parcels are split in the future, a special connection assessment charge could be levied.

"Generally, each buildable parcel in the district would benefit equally regardless of size or whether there is a home there now," he said.

A 60 percent petition from residents is the first step which authorizes the water board to begin an engineer's report. This report would include the design, plans and specifications of construction.

A public hearing would be held to make sure a majority is not in opposition to the district, he added. If that is approved, construction bids are called.

Lauderbach said if everything goes well, construction could begin next spring.

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REFERENCE