

# Council OKs vote on desal plant

City wouldn't call election before June 2014

*Desalination Plant*

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SANTA CRUZ — The City Council preliminarily approved an ordinance late Tuesday requiring the city to seek voter approval for a \$115 million desalination plant no earlier than June 2014.

The ordinance calls for a referendum on the proposed Westside facility during a regularly scheduled election only after the council certifies a critical environmental analysis, a draft of which is due this summer.

The move to eliminate the possibility of a special election in 2013 reflects a compromise that could minimize confusion with a citizen-led initiative calling for a vote only during a regularly scheduled election.

"Giving our community one opportunity to do that, the better it is for everyone," Vice Mayor Hilary Bryant said of a single citywide vote.

Previous language on the proposed ordinance would have allowed the city to call for a special election next year. Desal opponents who are gathering signatures for a November ballot initiative asking voters if they wanted to weigh in during a future

## DESAL

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regular election saw the city's move to get voter approval as early as 2013 as an attempt to short-circuit their effort.

Mayor Don Lane said he received assurances from city water officials and the city's desal partner, Soquel Creek Water District, that a delay until June 2014 will not hurt the project because it would allow spending on energy use, design and other aspects that precede construction. The initiative from desal opponents calls for the city not to incur bonded indebtedness for the project, which water officials say won't be required for pre-construction work.

However, desal opponents remain concerned a future council could repeal the ordinance, which in itself could be stopped by voters with a separate initiative drive. But, Lane said, "That's not going to happen."

Tuesday, the council also approved a plan to keep the plant carbon neutral by reducing energy use within the facility and conduct other offsets in the community. City officials who readily acknowledge the plant will use a lot of energy have been investigating ways to reduce it for months.

There would be an approximately 40 percent increase in indirect greenhouse gas emissions to supply water during a drought period. And performing reverse osmosis to remove the salt will require 10 times as much energy as it takes the city to treat 1,000 gallons of water at the city treatment plant.

The council made the move Tuesday so the new policy can be included in the ongoing Environmental Impact Report. Water department staff said the city could pay for local solar, power purchase agreements or other projects — that the city isn't currently participating in — to offset greenhouse gas emissions from the plant.

Activist Paul Johnston said

it didn't make sense to increase emissions by constructing and operating a facility when the city already has a mandate through its Climate Action Plan to reduce the emissions it's making now.

"It's just not competent planning to look at a single project out of context of the community's overall need," he said.

Former Mayor Cynthia Mathews, a founder of the pro-desal Community Water Coalition, said the plan is a thorough answer to concerns over high energy use.

"Santa Cruz should and can be leading edge, and I think this is a good start," she said.

The cost of the plant will be funded through bonds or rate increases or a combination, and shared with Soquel Creek Water District. The city, which serves 92,000 customers from Davenport to Live Oak, projects ratepayers will see a \$5 per month increase to build the plant.

In other action, the council also approved a request by

the Planning Department to keep in place limited hours of operation and entertainment for the former Cypress Lounge on Union Street, which is now under new ownership. The council changed the business' permits in October in response to violence, noise and other problems stemming from the bar.

Police report fewer calls for service since the restrictions were put into place, and the new owner of the bar to be called The Reef, connected to the popular Hawaiian restaurant Pono, did not object during the meeting. Neighbors supported the decision to reduce late-night hours and limit amplification for small-scale entertainment.

"We want to help keep this business open but we want no more late night club," said Marion Vittitow, who spoke for residents in the Union Street, Chestnut Street and Squid Row areas.

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