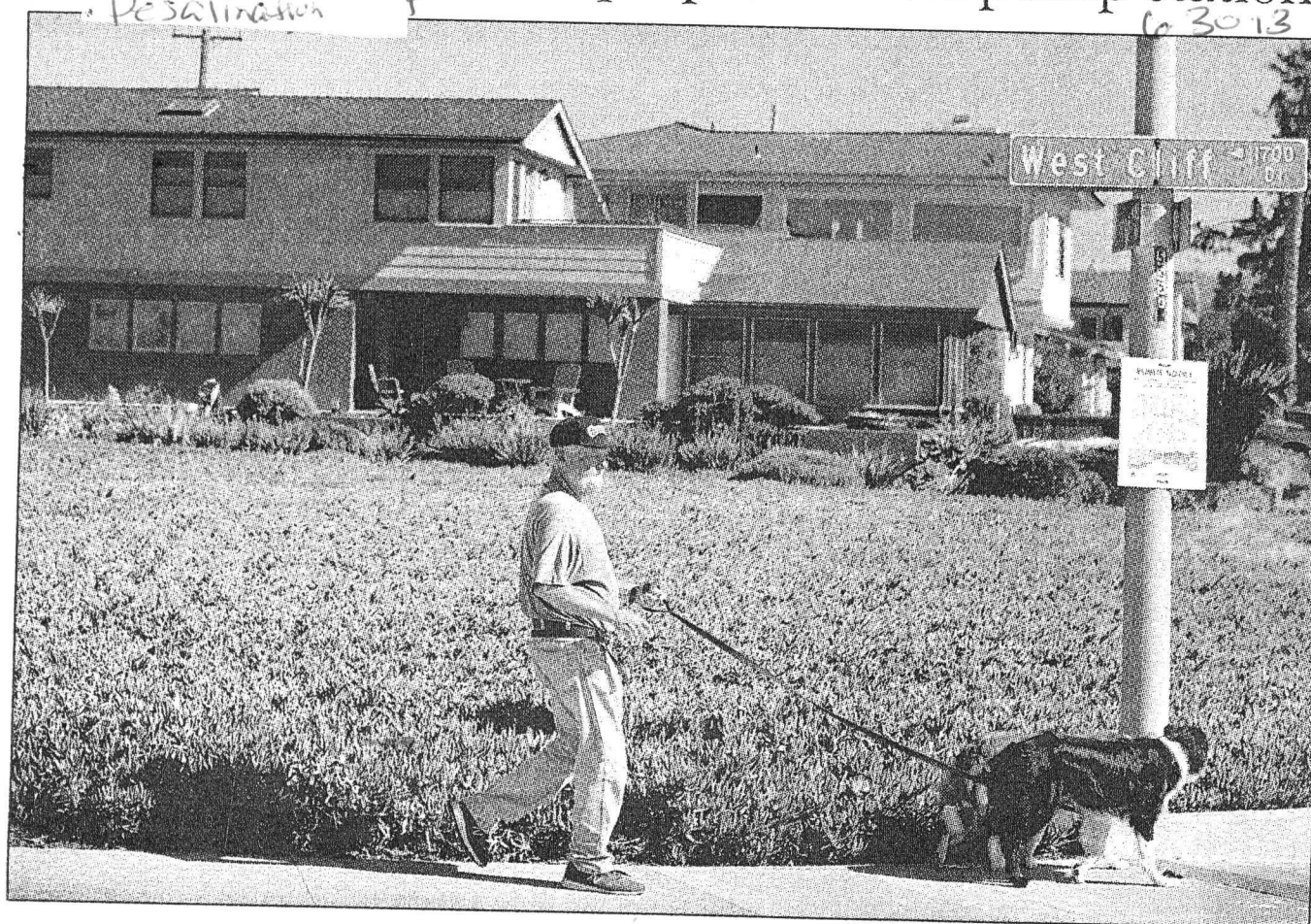


# Pumped Up

Westsiders upset over proposed desal pump station



A man walks his dog past the corner of West Cliff Drive and Merced Avenue in Santa Cruz on Friday morning. Residents are concerned about the noise and aesthetic impacts of a desalination pump station that could be built near West Cliff Drive. KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

By J.M. BROWN

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SANTA CRUZ — Although the public's interest in a proposed seawater desalination facility has grown gradually, tension between water managers and detractors over the need, costs and other big-picture questions have largely defined the debate.

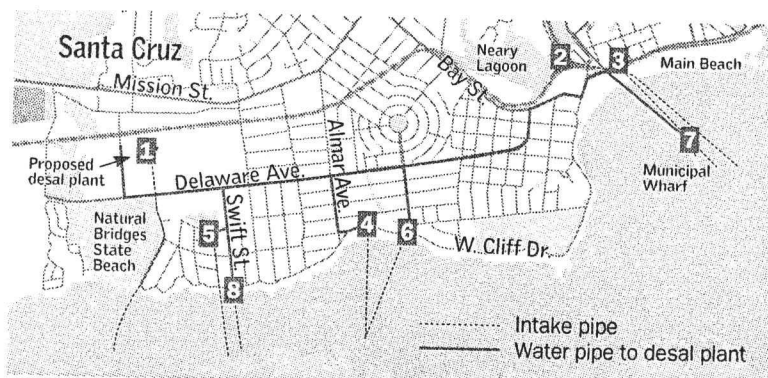
But ever since the city of Santa Cruz released a much-anticipated environmental evaluation of its water supply project in May, a much more narrow issue has awakened the consciousness of ratepayers and property owners. Five of eight proposed sites for a 2,500-square-foot pump station designed to convey water from an open-ocean intake system to a desalting plant would be located in residential areas on the Westside — the center of political activism in town.

Numerous residents of the Westside — where the \$129 million desalination system would be built if approved by voters and regulators — sounded alarms about the proposed pump station locations during a June 3 public meeting and are expected to do so again Monday. Residents who weren't following desal closely before say they are now paying attention because of concerns about the pump station's impacts on noise, aesthetics and other issues outlined by the draft environmental impact report.

SEE DESAL ON A2

## PROPOSED PUMP STATION LOCATIONS

The city of Santa Cruz and its desalination partner, the Soquel Creek Water District, have proposed eight potential sites for a pumping station that would move ocean water to a desalination facility on the Westside. The potential sites, which would be selected based on related open-ocean intake sites, are below along with their estimated total cost:



ANTHONY L. SOLIS/SENTINEL

- 1 \$42 MILLION: Desal plant area at Delaware Avenue and Natural Bridges Drive
- 2 \$36 MILLION: Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission property south of Depot Park used by city as corporation yard
- 3 \$33 MILLION: Motel parking lot at 525 Beach St. east of Pacific Avenue
- 4 \$31 MILLION: Undeveloped parcel at 1102 David Way near West Cliff Drive
- 5 \$30 MILLION: Natural Bridges school athletics field, behind 255 Swift St.
- 6 \$30 MILLION: City-owned greenbelt at West Cliff Drive and Woodrow Avenue
- 7 \$26 MILLION: Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf
- 8 \$25 MILLION: Three parcels at 1700 W. Cliff Drive near Modesto Avenue

SOURCE: Draft environmental impact report for desalination



# DESAL

Continued from A1

"Clearly, these are industrial facilities that are not appropriate in residential neighborhoods," said lawyer Michael Brodsky, a West Cliff Drive resident who lives near a proposed pump station site. "My reaction is, 'My God. What are they doing? Trying to stir up as much opposition as possible?'"

Three of the potential sites are located near West Cliff Drive, while one is located on a public school athletic field and another is adjacent to Neary Lagoon and a mobile home community. The three non-residential sites under consideration are in commercial or industrial areas, including at the actual desal plant.

City officials say they will take great pains to reduce noise and visual impacts and address other concerns from

## IF YOU GO DESAL EIR MEETING

**WHAT:** Santa Cruz Water Commission hosts meeting to take public comment on the draft environmental impact report for a proposed desalination facility.

**WHEN:** 6:30-9 p.m. Monday

**WHERE:** First Congregational Church, 900 High St., Santa Cruz

**DETAILS:** [www.scwd2desal.org](http://www.scwd2desal.org) or [www.cityofsantacruz.com](http://www.cityofsantacruz.com)

residents.

Heidi Luckenbach, desalination program manager for the city, said "public input is essential" and said an estimated 10 percent of public comments received so far about the state-mandated environmental report deal

with the pump stations.

She noted the report concluded that "all environmental impacts of the pump station site alternatives can be mitigated to less than significant." She said a number of factors will be considered before a final site is chosen, including costs, energy use and community compatibility.

### WHAT ARE THE PUMPS?

The city and its desalination partner, the Soquel Creek Water District, propose to build a facility that would transform seawater to 2.5 million gallons of drinking water each day to protect the city against drought and allow the district to rest overtaxed aquifers.

The city also faces federally mandated cutbacks in stream diversions to boost endangered fish habitat while the district is trying to halt saltwater intrusion.

Seawater would be collected through an open-ocean intake system screened to avoid sucking in or trapping marine organisms. The city is studying six intake points stretching from the Municipal Wharf to Natural Bridges Drive, but regardless of the location, the desal system needs a pump station to move water through new pipes to the desal facility located a half-mile walking distance from shore.

The pump station, which will contain three active pumps and an idle one, would be designed to process up to 7 million gallons of ocean water per day. The amount of raw water will always exceed the amount of drinking water produced because the process involves heaving sifting of solids and other steps that can cause water loss.

A total of 18 pump station sites were initially studied by the city, but only eight were reviewed in the environmental report. Ten were rejected because of space concerns,

anticipated development and other reasons, according to the report.

The consultant-authored report, which has cost \$1.5 million to date, does not select a preferred intake or pump site, but says the design will be tailored to the site. Such decisions will be made after costs, energy use, reliability, regulatory issues and other concerns are further fleshed out, Luckenbach said.

But residents say not knowing which configuration the city will choose is driving anxiety about the proposal. Many had requested the city give the public another 30 days to make comments on the May 13 report.

The city relented to those calls Friday by extending the deadline to Aug. 12. The move provides a total of 90 days for comment, twice the amount required under state law.

"It's clear that the public has become engaged in discussing our future water supply," Mayor Hilary Bryant said. "Extending the comment period allows more people to join in the discussions."

Construction of desal facilities, if approved by the City Council and district board, cannot begin before a community vote in June 2014 at the earliest. A host of regulators must also issue permits.

### MORE TIME URGED

Gary Miles, a retired UC Santa Cruz professor of Greek and Latin languages and history, was among those calling for more time to read the 2.5-inch thick report. He has lived in his Stockton Avenue home, behind a proposed pump station site at Natural Bridges school's athletic field, since 1972.

Miles was quick to say he is concerned about water supply issues in general and that his objections are more

than just a "not-in-my-backyard" concern. However, he acknowledged the proximity to the potential station has awakened him and neighbors to the city's desal plans, which have been under way since 2007.

"It focused it, absolutely," he said.

As soon as he found out about the proposed pump station, he passed leaflets around the block and along with neighbor Erica Aitken hosted a potluck that drew several dozen neighbors. Aitken said she was willing to consider the desal proposal until the city eyed a pump station site 30 yards from her home.

"We moved here because we can hear the sea and the coyotes and the people playing soccer in the field," said Aitken, who runs a graphics consulting business and lived in her home since 2008. "And all of that is going to go away if that thing is here."

Pacific Collegiate School currently occupies the Natural Bridges school property, but the charter program is slated to move. Property owner Santa Cruz City Schools plans to reopen a school there.

Superintendent Gary Bloom said the district has not taken a position on the overall desal proposal but said he hopes the city would "avoid an interagency conflict" by picking a different pump station site. The city did not formally notify the district about the pump station before the environmental report was released.

"The district needs all of the space on the campus for current and future use in serving students," Bloom said. "In addition, we are concerned that noise and other distractions associated with the pumping station could have a negative impact upon our instructional programs. Locating the facility on a school campus would

also raise security issues."

### ALL ABOUT NOISE

The environmental report says noise can be reduced to insignificant levels if the pump station is contained in an underground concrete vault rather than a 10-to-15-foot building. However, because an above-ground transformer would still emit noise, the city has proposed additional structural features and materials that will further insulate and absorb sound to match noise levels allowed by city rules.

"After constructing the pump station the city would be required to show that the maximum noise change requirement is being met before operations officially start," Luckenbach said.

Brodsky, the West Cliff Drive resident, doesn't buy such promises. He said the city hasn't done enough studies to really know how loud the pump stations will be.

"People walking on West Cliff and enjoying the peace and quite of a residential neighborhood" will feel an interference, he said. Brodsky said it appears the city is avoiding the high costs of placing the pump station directly at the desal facility, adding, "I don't see that as a valid excuse," he said.

Estimated costs for the locating the pump station at the desal plant are indeed the highest at \$42 million whereas costs for sites near residential areas are from \$25 million to \$36 million, according to the report. Two other commercial sites would cost \$26 million or \$33 million.

"We haven't ruled in or ruled out any specific site with regard to cost or other criteria because public input is essential to the process," Luckenbach said.

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