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Water service bad, Rio Del Mar residents complain

By STEVE STROTH
STAFF WRITER

Water service is so bad in sections of the Cuesta-Vista Del Mar areas of Rio Del Mar that one home owner said he can't get any water out of his pipes at least five times a month.

On top of that, the entire 390-home area on the hills above Clubhouse Drive has so little water pressure, local residents fear they have little or no fire protection.

Those were just two of the many concerns expressed by homeowners at a special meeting of the Soquel Creek Water District last night at Rio Del Mar School.

Actually, the water pressure problem is not a new one for the nearly 60-year-old water system. Water district workers have been patching the old, narrow pipes for years, and the influx of new developments has further taxed the system.

But residents and Soquel Creek Water directors — especially the residents — say they have grown tired of the situation.

"Five times a month I cannot get water out of the tap," said a Loma Prieta Drive homeowner who declined to give his name. "I have no fire protection. Please, let's at least have some water to drink," he told the board.

In addition to maintaining an adequate service level, residents have been particularly concerned about sufficient water pressure for fire protection after seeing the vast damage caused by the unchecked Lexington fire last month.

Current water pressure for the area yields about 130 gallons per minute. Fire officials say they need at least 500 gallons per minute to provide adequate protection.

The problem is that the 390 homes in the Cuesta-Vista Del Mar area are above the district's gravity flow system which feeds the rest of Rio Del Mar. That means a pump must be used to get water up to the homes.

Unfortunately, there are too many homes hooked up to the system, which drops water pressure throughout it.

To fix the problem, the water district would have to replace 2½ miles of old pipes, which are often as small as 2 inches wide, with 8-inch pipes. They would also need to put in new pumps.

The only question is, who will pay to fix the system and how

much are they willing to dole out?

Directors had hoped the nearly 40 homeowners who showed up for the meeting would say they support a special assessment district to pay for the \$717,000 in improvements necessary to bring water pressure up to a safe and dependable level.

By meeting's end, the directors were satisfied local residents are willing to pay — in some way, either with increased water rates or an assessment district — for the upgrade.

They will discuss those possible funding methods at their next meeting, Sept. 16.

But last night, what water directors got during most of the two-hour meeting was one gripe after another about water service and management of the district.

"Money should not be an issue," one resident said. "I can't believe you can find it acceptable that people can't even get water," said another.

Water board President Dan Kriege said the board has a master plan which calls for repair of the entire system. Unfortunately, the current water rate system won't cover the costs and the board did not want to embark on a project without knowing if money would be available.

"It doesn't do any good to go out and form an assessment district if the people don't want it," Kriege told the homeowners.

"If there is no commitment to share in the cost, there's no point in our staff to spend the time working on a \$700,000 system if there's no \$700,000 down the road," he said.

Water District General Manager Bob Johnson said the board did not call last night's meeting to tell residents what the board's plan is for the neighborhood.

"We have no definite plan," Johnson said. The district knows what needs to be done, but currently has no specific work plan or a method of funding the changes.

Preliminary estimates indicate an assessment district could cost homeowners about \$300 a year for 10 years. Some residents at the meeting suggested a districtwide rate increase to cover the cost, but Kriege said that may not result in a quick remedy to the problem in Rio del Mar.

REFERENCE

GREEN SHEET
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