

Water board delays treatment purchase

By BOB SMITH

Purchase of a \$600,000 water treatment plant in Soquel was delayed indefinitely Monday night while engineers look at the feasibility of building it on top of a mountain.

Soquel Creek County Water District directors decided to spend between \$25,000 and \$50,000 for additional engineering work to follow up on a suggestion by one engineer that the water treatment plant that would process water pumped from Soquel Creek be moved from an abandoned apple orchard off Main Street to a ravine several hundred feet higher overlooking Soquel and near the Monterey Bay Heights subdivision.

The water directors are also looking at a first-of-its-kind proposal to offer financial incentives to homeowners, contractors and landscape architects to replace old toilets and showers with new, water-saving models, and also use drought-tolerant plants and shrubs when landscaping new homes and businesses.

The delay in purchasing the Main Street orchard site, which borders Via Gatos in the Main Street subdivision, was urged by water director Dan Kriege after District General Manager Robert Johnson said an engineer pointed out the possibilities of building a small storage reservoir and the water treatment plant on the hilltop.

The engineer, Mark Moser of James M. Montgomery Engineers of Walnut Creek, has been asked by the district to double-check the suitability of building the water treatment plant in the old orchard and also advise the district directors if a small knoll above the site would be suitable for a water holding reservoir.

Johnson said Moser assured the district that a treatment plant could be built on the orchard property, but felt the knoll and a ravine behind it were too small to hold enough raw water from Soquel Creek to make it economically feasible to build the holding facility there.

But to the north, Moser pointed out, it would be possible to build a 30 to 50-foot-high earthen dam and store upwards of 50 acre-feet of water for treatment in an adjacent treatment plant.

Although the district would have to pump the water uphill to the treatment plant and reservoir, it would be downhill to the closest storage reservoir and the district's water distribution system. "A well-done study may be extremely significant," Kriege told the other directors.

"If we can put more water up there during the height of storms (when the water district expects to get most of its surface supply from Soquel Creek), we can operate the treatment plant longer," Kriege said.

He said a 50-acre-foot storage reservoir, would keep a three-million gallon-a-day water treatment plant operating for five days longer than otherwise possible.

But he also warned that the district will have to fully investigate the environmental and geological hazards in the area before constructing a dam, even one as small as now being proposed.

"If you are talking about a dam 30-50 feet high, that is a 'dam' and you have to consider all the ramifications," Kriege said.

Other directors agreed with Kriege's analysis. Board president Ken Izant noted that the district can now expect to pump water out of Soquel Creek for two to three days during and after each winter storm. Adding a small storage reservoir, he said, would increase the water treatment plant's usability. The board passed a motion by Kriege, seconded by director Jack Beebe, to delay purchasing the orchard site, and ask for engineering firms to bid on a survey of the new site.

Board members adopted a new water conservation resolution, banning the wasteful use of water, including the washing of homes, trailers, mobile homes, boats, vehicles, sidewalks, driveways and other exterior surfaces "without the use of a quick-acting, positive, shut-off nozzle on the hose," the watering of grass, lawn, ground-cover, shrubbery, crops, trees in a manner that allows water to run off the area, the failure to repair leaks or breaks in the water distribution system within 24 hours of discovery or notification by the district, and the operation of any ornamental fountain or automated car wash that does not use recycled water.

Penalties can include water shutoff and a \$20 reconnection fee.

Community Information Representative William Lovvorn presented two water conservation programs.

Lovvorn's proposals suggest the district underwrite programs where gardeners and homeowners would receive two drought-tolerant plants for the price of one, and discount connection fees to developers and new connectors who employ drought-tolerant theme landscapes.

He also suggested that the district provide retrofit kits that would cut the water consumption in toilets and showers, and also provide a percentage of the cost for replacing the conventional toilets and shower heads with the new water savings type.

Board members are now studying the proposals, similar to ones employed by Pacific Gas and Electric for the last several years in a successful effort to get its customers to install energy-saving devices in homes.

In other action Monday night, the board reelected Ken Izant as board chairman and Mervin Garibotto as vice president. The board also approved a negative environmental declaration on the eight monitoring wells it plans on drilling along the coastline.

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