

People get their say on water moratorium

By BILL AKERS

A public hearing on a proposed moratorium on new water connections in the Soquel Creek County Water District drew about 100 people to Soquel High School Monday night, where a good share of them were given a chance to express their opinions.

But the hearing was mostly a one-sided affair, with the audience doing the talking and the water district directors doing the listening. Board Chairman Ken Izant announced at the outset that the directors were there only to listen, and not to answer questions. "If we start a question and answer session, we'll be here all night," Izant said.

As a result, there will be another public hearing in two weeks at which people can ask the questions which went unanswered Monday night. This hearing will be held Monday, Nov. 3, at 7:30 p.m., at a location to be announced. Tuesday morning, district officials were attempting to line up the Soquel High School multi-purpose room again. This time, District Manager Bob Johnson said, there will be a public address system, the lack of which hindered Monday night's session. It was explained that the school had promised there would be a public address system in place, but there was none when the meeting started.

The water district board will meet again Monday at 7:30 p.m. at the district

office, but this meeting will be devoted to business items other than the proposed moratorium.

At the next public hearing in two weeks, persons wishing to ask questions of the directors must submit them in advance in writing to the district office, 5180 Soquel Drive. No questions will be taken from the floor the night of the hearing, Johnson said.

At Monday night's hearing, people wishing to make a statement were asked to sign up in advance, and then were called in order by the district's legal counsel, Robert Bosso.

The opinions expressed by the parade of speakers which followed were fairly predictable, with some builders expressing their concern for the "little people" who will be hurt by a moratorium, and the self-styled little people expressing their fears of the "big developers" who will take their water away. There were dire predictions of the economic ruin that would follow a moratorium, and others of the ecological disaster that would result if one is not imposed.

Although most of the people in the audience seemed to favor a moratorium — or accept the fact that one appears inevitable at this point — they were impartial when it came to applauding the speakers. Just about everyone got a hand, regardless of the viewpoint expressed. The lone

exception was the speaker who intimated that all the trouble was being caused by people who had time to stir it up because they weren't out working.

Some of the speakers and their comments were:

Richard Monterosso, developer of a small project: If the facts (about the overdraft) are correct, then something must be done." But he urged the directors to move cautiously.

Jim Warrnock, secretary of the Pine Tree Lane homeowners association, who told about that group's problems with salt water intrusion into their water well. "The product (water) is in short supply," he said, urging the directors to allow single-family home builders to have water, but not large developers.

Peter Sanford, owner of a single-family lot in Seascape, who is in line for a building permit in 1981. "We've been waiting a long time (to build)," he told the directors, urging them to allow 1981 permit holders to connect to the water system.

Jim Hannibal, who asked a series of questions about the district's water rights, which went unanswered until later in the meeting. At that time, Bosso explained, in answer to Hannibal's questions, that the district does not have authority over private wells at this time, that it has appropriative rights, but not riparian rights, to water in Soquel Creek. "But Soquel Creek has been adjudicated," he explained,

and the riparian and appropriative rights are pretty well known."

Anthony Espinosa, builder of a 14-unit project, asked that the moratorium allow 1981 permit holders to connect. "We've spent our money, but we're not allowed to build. Our economic future is at stake ... we are trapped."

Steve Bergstrom, who also is in line for a 1981 building permit, said, "We were led to believe we had a contract (for a water connection) with the water district."

Isabel Millsap, a 47-year Soquel resident, accused "big developers" of wanting to build "banana boxes on the side of the hill. It's time to get some starch in our back bones and, if there's no water, let them know," she said, to great applause from the audience.

Anna Jean Cummings, chairman of Save Soquel, urged directors to impose a moratorium, and make it effective immediately. "It would be a courageous act," she said, advising the directors to disregard any "rumors of a recall" should a moratorium be instituted.

Jerry Brown, a builder, said the information obtained from the county Planning Department relating to pending projects in the district "is not accurate and up to date." He said his firm was "within inches" of getting building permits, "but to tell us now 'that's too bad' because there's no water, that's not a reasonable solution." Economic disaster would follow a moratorium, he said.

That was an opinion shared by Rob Marani, one of Brown's partners, who said, "The board must realize what effect your decision will have on the local economy." Marani also challenged the data on which the proposed moratorium is based.

Elsie Forhan, a real estate person and private well owner, said a moratorium "is absolutely necessary and should be put in effect immediately."

Dick Jones said "it's time to take drastic action."

Bruce Reed, president of the Santa Cruz Builders Exchange said, "we're a room full of victims," then

proceeded to challenge the accuracy of the USGS report which shows an overdraft of the water supply.

Walter Manlock said he went through this in Santa Barbara several years ago, said the group should get together and take the district to court if it imposes a moratorium.

A letter was read from the League of Women Voters favoring a moratorium, conservation program and a ground-water management district which would give the water district control over all pumping from the underground.