

Water: Cooperation pledged, committee formed

By BOB SMITH

Pledging mutual cooperation to solve the north county's water problems, a nine-member steering committee was set up Tuesday night to start studying the county's water future and the intertwined growth problem.

County supervisors, city council members from Capitola, Scotts Valley and Santa Cruz, water board members from the Central Santa Cruz, Soquel Creek, Scotts Valley, Lompico and San Lorenzo Valley county water districts met in the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium for 2½ hours to openly talk about the water shortages now faced by every water purveyor in the area with the exception of the city of Santa Cruz.

Participants generally agreed to take a new look at the county's water master plan, with several elected officials urging the county and the three north county cities to plan their future growth in light of the known limitations on the county's water resources.

The tone of the meeting, hosted by Santa Cruz Mayor Joe Ghio, was set by John McGuire, Santa Cruz's

assistant water director.

"All of the water purveyors, excepting Santa Cruz, have or will have a water shortage," McGuire said, summing up information provided over the past month by the districts.

"The present water supplies are critical for five of the six suppliers (in the north county) and it is fortunate that Santa Cruz has the ability to solve the problem, at least on a short term basis," McGuire added.

"The City Water Department is the largest supplier in the county and there are available surpluses in the system good through the year 2000."

The Central Santa Cruz County water district, which services the Freedom Boulevard-Day Valley area of Aptos, is now concerned about its future water supply and its ability to serve the growth targeted for the area, directors Tom Kelley and Carol Trengove told the audience.

"Growth management," said Mrs. Trengove, referring to the county's Measure J ordinance, "has set artificial limits and we can no longer rely on the historical projections."

"We see a closer need for

cooperation between county planning, environmental health and the water agencies.

"The need is evident for responsible growth management," she added.

Soquel Creek director Dan Kriege told the audience, "We have found as a result of the growth control measures that the Soquel area is an area where growth is being allowed."

Historically, Kriege said, the district has grown by some 300 connections a year.

"Now," said Kriege, referring to the time since the county has focused development, under provisions of Measure J, into the urbanized midcounty, "we find ourselves with more than 2000 requests for service — at the same time as the U.S. Geological Survey reports that our water supply is much smaller (than originally believed)."

"You can not segregate water planning and growth planning," Kriege, who is the operations manager for the vast Santa Clara County Water District, told the audience. "We have to integrate the planning."

"Water agencies are no longer in the position of being able to serve speculative growth. It is too expensive."

"We need to know," Kriege continued, "what growth we have to meet, but water agencies cannot limit growth. General purpose government

(cities and counties) must set the limits."

The bulk of the urban building permits issued in 1979 and 1980, a county planning department report distributed at the meeting shows, have been issued in the midcounty areas served by the Soquel Creek County Water District, and to a lesser extent in the unincorporated areas getting water from the city of Santa Cruz.

"In 1979-80, 1,074 urban building permits were issued by the county within the Santa Cruz City and the Soquel Creek water districts," the county report said. "This number represents 90 percent of the total urban permits issued by the county; a majority were issued within the Soquel Creek County Water District."

Soquel Creek Water, in 1979, absorbed 319 or 74.5 percent of the county's urban permits. The raw number rose to 436 in 1980, but the percentage dropped to 60.5 percent, due to an increase in the building activity in the Santa Cruz water department's unincorporated service area.

The city of Capitola, not subject to the requirements of Measure J, will see its future building limited by the fact it

is running out of vacant land.

Mayor Jerry Clarke said the city planning staff estimates Capitola only has 400 more housing units — approximately 820 new people — before complete buildout.

"If this growth occurs in the next three to five years, that would be an eight percent increase (1.8 percent a year) in our population," Clarke said.

(Population in the unincorporated areas grew 1.8 percent between 1979 and 1980, the county staff estimated.)

"But from a practical standpoint," Clarke added, "it would not be reasonable to expect it in the next five years."

Pat Liberty, chairman of the Board of Supervisors, defended the county's growth management policy.

"We are concerned," she said, after pledging the county's cooperation in new planning efforts, "we are cognizant that approval of developments in your water districts impact your abilities to plan."

"But the Board of Supervisors does not approve any development in your districts," she added, "without the 'will serve'

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letters from your water district managers."

The "will serve" letters referred to by Mrs. Liberty are a county requirement on subdividers and major developers that they obtain written indication from the affected water district that it is willing to provide service.

"The county also operates under the mandate (Measure J) to concentrate growth in the urban areas," added Mrs. Liberty.

Santa Cruz City Councilman Bert Muhly, speaking for the full council, said the city is willing to share its water resources with the surrounding district if the county and the three cities can come to an agreement on growth management that is consistent with the 1.4 percent growth limitations of the city's Measure O.

County supervisor Gary Patton called for area wide planning based on the availability of water, not on the assumption that water can be provided for whatever development is allowed

politically.

That approach is unrealistic, countered Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat. "We won't stop people moving here even though we enforce Measures O and J. We can not use water as a growth control. We have to approach the issue realistically in the next 50 years and establish groundrules before we start on any plan.

"Are we going to use water as a growth control (mechanism) or develop it for the needs of the county," she asked.

Muhly told Mrs. Liddicoat he wasn't "suggesting we plan growth by keeping our hand on the faucet."

The elected officials, in the end, agreed to set up a

steering committee, composed of one elected official from each of the nine agencies at the meeting, to look at the problems of long and short range water and growth management planning in the area. Appointed to the committee were Ghio, County Supervisor Dan Forbus, Kriege, Mrs. Trengove, Scotts Valley Mayor Jun Lee, Capitola City Councilman Robert Garcia; San Lorenzo Valley Water Director Russ Husted, Scotts Valley Water Director Rich Petersen.

The committee was instructed to issue a report in six weeks, with Ghio appointed temporary chairman and Santa Cruz providing temporary staff assistance.