

District water exportation halted

By LIA MARTIN
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Water — the lifeblood of any agricultural community — was the subject of impassioned commentary Wednesday night during a Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency (PVWMA) public hearing at the city council chambers.

After listening to residents, growers, attorneys and interested residents, the majority of PVWMA board members approved a draft ordinance to stop the export of ground water from within the Pajaro Valley boundaries.

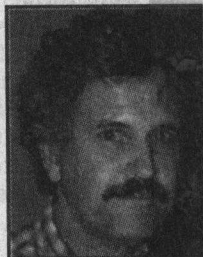
Growers and residents alike urged the PVWMA board members to aggressively pursue putting together a resolution or a draft ordinance, so that in the future, developers could not exploit the water inside Pajaro Valley agency boundaries.

Integrity, credibility and doing what's right were three points Dick Peixoto emphasized to the PVWMA board members.

"The PVWMA agency has not brought one gallon of solution to solving this problem," said Peixoto, as nearly 20 people in the audience clapped and cheered him on. "Why

is it so hard for this board to solve these problems. Take a stand!"

The Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, represented by Michael Theriot, presented a letter from David Guy, an attorney at the California Farm Bureau Federation in Sacramento, stating that the PVWMA board members had been "delinquent in not protecting the native ground water supply within the Pajaro basin."



Theriot

Guy also accused the PVWMA of not pursuing legal action against Rancho Larios for its proposal to illegally pump ground water from within the Pajaro basin, and failing to enact a meaningful ground water export ordinance.

Rancho Larios, a housing development being built in San Benito County, went through all the hurdles necessary to export water from the Aromas County Water District, which includes some wells within the PVWMA boundaries.

Reading from Guy's letter, Theriot said that if the Pajaro Valley basin is in an "overdraft" situation — or limited water situation — as the PVWMA board has stated, ground water within the Pajaro Valley basin could not be pumped out of the agency boundaries for Rancho Larios' use, given the principles of water law.

Punching holes in the farm bureau's argument, Anthony Lombardo, Rancho Larios' attorney, told PVWMA board members that the Rancho Larios property was properly annexed into the Aromas County Water District.

"Your agency did not object to the annexation at the proper time," said Lombardo. "There was a time and place for you to object to this, and this is past the time."

Agreeing with Lombardo, the attorney representing the PVMWA, Bruce Richardson, said that the board did not have the authority to say "no" to the Aromas Coun-

ty Water District regarding their exporting water to Rancho Larios. But, he said, once the draft ordinance is in place, the agency will have more control over such cases.

"We have not managed our water properly," said Tom Am Rhein, PVWMA board member. "Because we failed, now we have this big mess."

It was agreed by all board members that in the future they would be prepared to make a stand actively to manage the Pajaro Valley basin ground water.

"If we have no ordinance, and we get a new board in here, we could be caught asleep at the wheel again," said Am Rhein.

To a dwindling audience, PVWMA board members said they would adopt a "fast track" for an initial study for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance for the draft ordinance on the exportation of water.

The initial CEQA study will be finished Oct. 15, said PVWMA board members, and will be executed in-house.