

THE LAST STAND: JULIAN-CUYAMACA IS ONLY VOLUNTEER FIRE DISTRICT THAT HAS NOT YET JOINED COUNTY FIRE AUTHORITY



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Story and photos by Julie Pendray

Photo: County Fire Authority Chief Tony Mecham addressed about 100 people at a special meeting of Julian/Cuyamaca Fire Protection District on July 27.

August 9, 2017 (Julian) – Impassioned pleas to save the volunteer fire operation in this historic California gold mining town were rebutted by cold, hard, financial facts at a special public meeting of the Julian/Cuyamaca Fire Protection District.

As the last rural fire district holding out against dissolving into the County Fire Authority (CFA), Julian will lose its County subsidy on January 1, 2018. Julian-Cuyamaca's district will not be able to provide the current level of fire and ambulance services without it, according to its chief. The County's dissolution proposal is the result of a 2015 contract between the district and County in exchange for subsidies. It would establish Cal-Fire as the operator of Julian and Cuyamaca fire stations under the CFA.

Under that contract, the district was supposed to file dissolution papers by July 1 but has not done so. Residents are holding their ground in the wake of public regrets and warnings by other rural districts who have allowed the County to take over. At issue are possible

slower emergency response times, as well as loss of knowledgeable volunteers and community identity.

The July 27 meeting was a calm gathering of about 100 people, in spite of years of threats of lawsuits against the board and board member replacement, a contentious town hall meeting, and an allegation of a violation of the Brown Act (state public meeting law) regarding negotiations with the County.

Some residents see the County as strong-arming locals to opt for big government. One current board member, Brian Kramer, was quoted in meeting minutes on the district web site as describing a meeting with the CFA: "Threatens and then schmoozing is how the meeting went with Reddick and Meechum (sic.)"

Tony Mecham, the CFA Chief, gave a presentation at the nearly three-hour recent meeting at Julian's brand new fire station on Highway 79, which will be turned over to the County if the dissolution goes ahead. Hermann Reddick, County Fire Program Manager, also attended, along with Julian's part-time fire chief Rick Marinelli, who Mecham said will be offered a job with the County if the district dissolves.

Marinelli summed up the district's problem: "The money simply isn't there."

The 2017-2018 budget, available on the district's web site, shows a transfer to reserve of just \$54,000 for fire services and \$8,000 for the ambulance operation. Financial reports show projected income from fire services of \$557,100 and expenses of \$503,000. That includes the current County subsidy of \$60,000, which will no longer be offered. The ambulance services income is projected at \$517,000, with expenses of \$509,000. No County ambulance subsidy is noted.

Previous reports on *East County Magazine (ECM)* indicate that the ambulance service operated in the red for seven out of 10 years prior to 2013. That year, an anonymous donor provided \$85,000 to keep the district in the black. The ambulance side of the operation has frequently been the money problem, according to information shared at the meeting, due to increasing costs of upgrading technology, plus Julian's older population (median age is 53.7 according to CityData.com) and services provided to patients without insurance compared to a shortfall in compensation from Medi-Cal and Medicare.

Under the County proposal, Julian would continue to get assistance during emergencies but priority would go to areas under the CFA and Julian would be billed for help that was offered, Mecham said.

The County proposal for Julian has these provisions:

1. CFA would provide a Cal-Fire-level fire chief and the office would be at a Cal-Fire station in Julian. Two career Cal-Fire staff would be posted at each station. Stipends would be offered to volunteers. The area of responsibility would expand to include Shelter Valley and Ocotillo Wells.
2. The district board would become an advisory board. Julian would have a seat on Community Service Area (CSA) 135.

3. All existing volunteers could apply to become CFA volunteers but they'd have to take and pass a physical exam and background test to be accepted.
4. Emergency medical services would be opened up for bidding.

One fear expressed by residents about the move to merge into CFA operations is that the San Diego County charter does not include fire services. That begs the question: could the County back out of serving unincorporated areas in the future? *ECM* asked County Supervisor Dianne Jacob, who represents Julian, if she thought fire service should be added to the charter, <http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/cob/docs/charter.pdf> which currently does not even contain the word "fire," and also, what her response is to the backcountry's expressed concerns. She was not at the meeting but responded by email afterward.

"Ultimately, it's up to the fire district to determine if it wants to consolidate or remain a stand-alone department," said Jacob, who was a driving force behind the CFA when it was established in 2007, after the Witch Creek Fire that began near Santa Ysabel, ripped through Julian and all the way to Rancho Bernardo, killing two people, destroying 1,125 residential structures and injuring 45 firefighters. The cost to suppress the conflagration was \$18 million.

Jacob continued, "The recent decision by the Rural Fire District and Pine Valley Fire District Boards answers many of the questions and concerns raised by residents on whether or not to join the San Diego County Fire Authority (SDCFA). Their respective boards made the decision that to join SDCFA would enhance fire and emergency medical services in their communities and improve coordination of resources throughout the region."

Pine Valley Fire Protection District dissolved this week. The district served its community for 70 years. Fire Chief Bob Uribe notified residents via Valley Views, a community newsletter, attached to this story.

In 2013, Jacob told *ECM* that putting all the rural fire districts under the CFA would give the agency "the same regional importance as the Sheriff's Department, the District Attorney's Office and the Probation Department."

"That would happen whether fire protection is added to the county charter or not," she said in 2013. "Public safety operations, such as those within the Sheriff's Department, are currently not included in the San Diego County charter. As part of the consolidation process, the county must provide a long-range plan to ensure that the level of fire protection is adequate. In other words, the county wouldn't be able to just walk away. That's a big improvement over the current situation. Never before has fire protection been a part of county government."

County financial support for fire services to unincorporated areas ended in 1978, after passage of Prop. 13. That caused communities to start their own volunteer services. However, the County of San Diego did not add fire services to its charter like other major counties have, such as Los Angeles. <http://file.lacounty.gov/lac/charter.pdf>

ECM also asked Supervisor Bill Horn for comments about the charter because his district includes a large swath of backcountry, such as Pala and Borrego Springs. He referred the question to Mecham, who said fire services don't need to be in the charter.

"With the creation of County Service Area 135 and the associated transfer of duties and responsibilities for latent powers of fire protection and emergency medical services, the County now has a legal mandate to provide fire protections and a percentage of the property tax revenue is dedicated solely to this function," Mecham said by email. "CSA 135 is not different than a fire district other than it is considered a dependent special district under the County Board of Supervisors. Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara County Fire Departments are also operated as dependent districts under the Board. In the 1970s the County did not have CSA 135 or any legal requirement to provide fire protection, it was purely discretionary. Now, it is not discretionary revenue but dedicated revenue."

However, George Lucia, who retired as Palomar Mountain Fire District chief in 2013, has warned the Julian district not to join the County Fire Authority, which his former district did, as reported by ECM. "If I could turn back time, I would never put pen to paper with the County," he said. NBC news reported Lucia saying, "I have regretted it every day since then," according to the *ECM* account.

In recent years, a Campo fire district board member, Craig A. Williams, wrote a letter that was posted on a Julian community web site, saying his district had more "dark" unstaffed days since the change. He urged Julian residents to raise money to keep their independent operation. Cal-Fire agreed there were dark days but not as many as Williams said and no lack of coverage, but simply lesser-trained personnel.

According to then Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department Assistant Chief Cliff Kellogg in 2013, CFA has had staffing problems that have caused "as many as six or seven unstaffed fire stations a day throughout the county," the Valley News Roadrunner [reported](#).

Under CFA, Cal-Fire firefighters could be dispatched somewhere else, so the fear of rural communities is that they could be caught in a wildfire without speedy assistance. Julian and Cuyamaca, near Cleveland National Forest, are vulnerable settings, where residents still well remember the death of a state firefighter in nearby Wynola during the Cedar Fire of 2003. Cuyamaca was leveled by the fire and the historic downtown of Julian narrowly escaped destruction. Volunteer firefighters were critical in saving homes -- some lost their own, while saving those of others. <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-julian-survives-cedar-fire-38-percent-contained-2003oct31-story.html>

At the special board meeting in Julian, the public referred to a more recent Shelter Valley fire in which a Cal-Fire employee with less experience was stationed there on his own and had insufficient training to deal with the vehicle during an emergency. But Mecham said that was just one incident. He asked the public to consider all the other times when fire service goes well.

While the CFA can offer paid staffing 24/7 and possibly lower insurance rates, districts that have moved under the County have complained about "promises made but not kept," according to *ECM* articles. Some have questioned whether lower insurance rates will be

available if longer response times give wildfires a chance to grow, due to Cal-Fire's lack of knowledge of backcountry roads.

Discussions about Julian's possible dissolution have been ongoing since 2013, after Marinelli approached the CFA for financial assistance soon after he was hired.

At the July 27 special meeting, his blunt financial summary was like a splash in the face with cold water in response to some speakers' more subjective concerns. After one resident talked about the cohesive community spirit, in which people would continue to help the district and urged Marinelli and the board to "forget the money," Marinelli said with a frown, "We can't forget the money." In response to speakers declaring that the local operation in this tiny mountain town reflects the spirit of the backcountry, Marinelli was emphatic. "I don't want a quaint little historical fire department. I want a state-of-the-art fire service."

In the early 2000s, the district had a reported reserve of nearly \$400,000, according to ECM accounts. But it has faced litigation, workers comp claims, increased insurance rates, increasing high technology costs, equipment replacement, radio system costs, loss of property tax revenue due to wildfires and loss of County funds that offset salaries. In recent years, the County has provided an annual \$60,000 subsidy. In 2013, the subsidy was as much as \$100,00 to cover all station operations and dispatch fees.

Julian property owners pay an assessment fee of \$50 per parcel and that hasn't changed in at least 30 years. In 2013, the board considered putting the possible dissolution or an assessment increase to a public vote. However, the cost of a 2014 special election was deemed too expensive, according to *ECM* articles. That decision came after a board vote about dissolution ended in a tie (2-2) which meant no action took place. The board president then and now, Jack Shelver, voted then for joining the County. Aida Tucker, who also is still on the board, voted against. At the July 27 special meeting, board member Kirsten Starlin said she was uncomfortable making a decision without putting the issue before the community for a vote. That would mean the item would go on the ballot during a primary or general election. There is no current move to do that, Shelver told *ECM* on Aug. 8, after the regular board meeting.

At the recent special meeting, a volunteer firefighter, David Loader, with 25 years serving the district, told the gathering, "We're at this stage now because our board let us down. We should have been doing this two years ago. If the community as a whole believes we should (dissolve) this district, then we can do this with a consensus. Get in touch with the board, let them know what you think, then they don't have to be burdened with it, because they haven't made a decision in two years anyway."

None of the public who spoke said they were in favor of the dissolution.

For many people present, the heart of this matter resides with the longtime volunteers. One resident told the board, "These people are like family." Others asked whether current volunteers could continue to operate under a CFA controlled station, given the state's grueling standards for the qualifying physical test, which many agree most of Julian's volunteers wouldn't be able to pass.

Mecham said the CFA is still exploring possibilities.

“There’s no age cut off,” he said. “There is a value to the district even if they can’t crawl under buildings anymore. I will come up and have a cup of coffee with the volunteers. We need to hear from them what they want. I have great respect for the people who have been here. The volunteers have been a central part of the community. There has to be a willingness by both parties to compromise.” He said there might be home-based duties that some volunteers could perform. The CFA has previously suggested volunteers who don’t pass the physical could do crowd control or help with water tenders, according to ECM reports.

No action was taken at the special meeting. After it adjourned, Shelver told ECM that the subject “is a complex issue.”

In 2013, board member Aida Tucker (now vice president) told the public at a board meeting that she and fellow members of the Julian/Cuyamaca district weren’t “accountants or lawyers” or “backroom dealing politicians with hidden agendas” but rather they are “Julian locals trying to do what is right.”

At the recent special meeting, several of them nodded in concurrence when Starlin mentioned she’d been losing sleep over the issue. She said she knew Mecham had, too.

To dissolve or stay independent. It is considered “one of the most important decisions to be made in the history of Julian,” according to one member of the public, Bob Adams, in a previous *ECM* article. He added, “Boards like this are the bedrock of America.”

If the district does dissolve, the new fire station where the recent meeting was held – for which residents raised funds – would transfer to the CFA along with all the district’s other assets and liabilities. The dissolution would be performed through LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission).

No action was taken at the Aug. 8 regular Julian-Cuyamaca board meeting. Board president Jack Shelver told *ECM* by phone, “We went into closed session to discuss strategy on the issue. We’ll be having talks again with the County in two or three weeks.”

East Bay Times

East Bay reservoir expansion plan wins support of environmental groups



The Los Vaqueros Reservoir dam south of Brentwood would be raised 55 feet under a plan to expand the reservoir. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group)

By [Denis Cuff](#) | dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

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BRENTWOOD — A \$914 million plan to expand the Los Vaqueros Reservoir as drought insurance for millions of Bay Area residents picked up endorsements Monday from six conservation groups in a rare display of environmental support for new water development.

Environmental groups are pleased because the project would provide large amounts of water for Central Valley wetlands, habitat for ducks, geese and other wildlife, in addition to storing water for people and farms.

“As a coalition, we consider these wildlife refuge benefits to be critically important,” the Nature Conservancy, Audubon California, and four other groups wrote to the California Water Commission. “The problem is so significant that some refuges ... are left virtually dry in drought years.”

The environmental coalition urged the state commission to look favorably on a request for \$434 million in voter-approved state bond money to expand the reservoir southeast of Brentwood.

A coalition of 12 water agencies are cooperatively planning to raise the Los Vaqueros earthen dam by 55 feet, increasing its storage capacity from 160,000 acre feet to 275,000-acre feet, enough water to meet the annual needs of 1.4 million people.

The Contra Costa Water District, owner of Los Vaqueros, is coordinating the grant application. Other partnering agencies include the Santa Clara Valley Water District, East Bay Municipal Utility District, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, Alameda County Zone 7 Water District, Alameda County Water District and Grassland Water District. The latter manages wildlife refuges near Los Banos in Merced County.

Meanwhile, further studies on the expansion have raised its tentative price tag to \$914 million, up from a previous estimate of some \$800 million, the Contra Costa Water District reported Monday in submitting its grant application.

An expanded Los Vaqueros Reservoir would provide 46,000 acre feet of water annually on average for Central Valley refuges, the six environmental groups said.

Only five percent of the Central Valley's wetlands remain because most were drained, diked, developed, plowed over and built on, the groups wrote.

The letter signers also include the Planning and Conservation League, California Waterfowl Association, Defenders of Wildlife, and Point Blue Conservation Science.

The proposed reservoir expansion project calls for a new pipeline enabling Contra Costa Water District to ship Delta water to the state's Bethany Reservoir, where it could be moved south of the Delta to wildlife refuges.

"The potential expansion of Los Vaqueros into a regional facility presents a significant opportunity for our customers, the environment and local agency partners," said Lisa Borba, the Contra Costa Water District Board president.

The California Water Commission is scheduled in June 2018 to decide on grants from state Proposition 1, passed by voters in 2014. If funded, the Los Vaqueros expansion could begin in 2022 and finish in 2026 or 2027.

63 million Americans exposed to unsafe drinking water

Agnel Philip, Elizabeth Sims, Jordan Houston and Rachel Konieczny, News21 Published 3:00 p.m. ET Aug. 14, 2017 | Updated 6:30 p.m. ET Aug. 15, 2017



The United Nations' goals for 2030 look like they could come up short.

As many as 63 million people — nearly a fifth of the United States — from rural central California to the boroughs of New York City, were exposed to potentially unsafe water more than once during the past decade, according to a News21 investigation of 680,000 water quality and monitoring violations from the Environmental Protection Agency.

The findings highlight how six decades of industrial dumping, farming pollution, and water plant and distribution pipe deterioration have taken a toll on local water systems.

Those found to have problems cleaning their water typically took more than two years to fix these issues, with some only recently resolving decades-old violations of EPA standards and others still delivering tainted water, according to data from the agency's Safe Drinking Water Information System.

Many local water treatment plants, especially those in small, poor and minority communities, can't afford the equipment necessary to filter out contaminants. Those can include arsenic found naturally in rock, chemicals from factories and nitrates and fecal matter from farming. In addition, much of the country's aging distribution pipes delivering the water to millions of people are susceptible to lead contamination, leaks, breaks and bacterial growth.

Experts warn contamination in water can lead to cancer, gastrointestinal diseases and developmental delays in children. The EPA estimates local water systems will need to invest \$384 billion in the coming decades to keep water clean. The cost per person is more than twice as high in small communities as it is in large towns and cities.

The EPA and water treatment industry consider the coming years a crucial period for American drinking water safety as pipes and treatment plants built in the mid-20th century reach the end of their useful lives.

“We’re in this really stupid situation where, because of neglect of the infrastructure, we’re spending our scarce resources on putting our fingers in the dike, if you will, taking care of these emergencies, but we’re not doing anything to think about the future in terms of what we should be doing,” said Jeffrey Griffiths, a former member of the Drinking Water Committee at the EPA’s Science Advisory Board.



Trey Brown, 11, of Belmont, N.C., hasn't been allowed to swim in his family's pool since harmful chemicals were discovered in their water. (Photo: Chelsea Rae Ybanez, NEWS21)

As water systems age, 63% of Americans are now concerned a “great deal” about drinking water pollution, according to a Gallup poll released in March that showed such worries at their highest level since 2001. Drinking water pollution has long been a top environmental concern for Americans — above air pollution and climate change, according to the same poll.

Many of the nation’s largest city systems violated EPA safety standards during the past decade, potentially exposing tens of millions of people to dangerous contaminants. New York City’s system, which serves 8.3 million people, failed standards meant to protect its water from viruses and bacteria two times during that period. The system still hasn’t addressed its most recent violation from February for not building a cover for one of its water reservoirs, according to EPA records.

The problems extend to the country’s large suburbs. Tacoma, Wash.’s, system failed to meet a federally mandated timeline for installing a treatment plant meant to kill the parasite cryptosporidium. Chris McMeen, deputy superintendent for the Seattle suburb’s system, which serves 317,600 people, said the pathogen has never been found in dangerous levels in the city’s water. The system was also cited for failing to test for dozens of chemicals during the past decade.

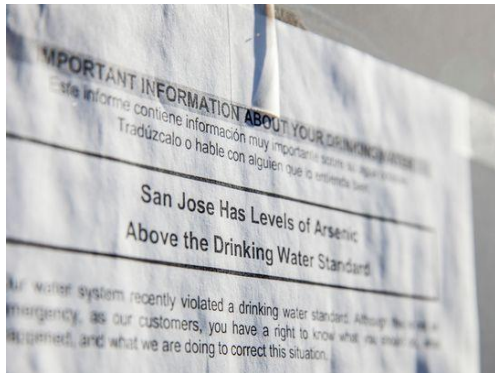
In Waukesha, Wis., 18 miles west of Milwaukee, decades of radium contamination from the city’s underground aquifer prompted officials to draft a proposal to draw water from Lake Michigan for its 71,000 residents. The Great Water Alliance, a \$200 million project, is expected to be completed by 2023.

Thousands of rural towns have the most problems because communities often lack the expertise and resources to provide safe drinking water.

In several Southwestern states, 2 million people received groundwater tainted with arsenic, radium or fluoride from their local water systems, with many exposed to these chemicals for years before hundreds of small, low-income communities could afford to filter them out. Some still haven’t cleaned up their water.

Contamination in rural areas from these naturally occurring chemicals, found in the bedrock of aquifers, made Texas, Oklahoma and California the top states for EPA drinking water quality violations during the past decade.

“Sometimes it’s orange, sometimes it’s green, sometimes it’s brown,” said Melissa Regeon, a lifelong resident of Brady, Texas, which is trying to secure money for water system upgrades to filter out the radium in its water. “You just never know. It looks horrible.”



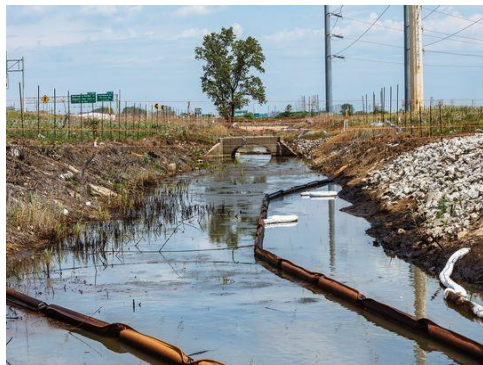
A public notice outside a water treatment facility at the Community Center in San Jose, Calif. (Photo: Maria Esquinca, NEWS21)

Small water systems in California’s San Joaquin Valley have battled both farming pollution and natural contamination from arsenic for years. High levels of nitrate from farm runoff and groundwater rock are linked to low oxygen levels in babies and cancer. Those levels have been found in systems serving 317,000 people during the past decade in the valley, 10,000 square miles of concentrated farming in the state’s center.

The crash of the coal mining industry in southern West Virginia has left hundreds of residents in charge of their own small water systems — some of which date to the Civil War. Residents in the mountains of Wyoming and Fayette counties say they are getting too old to maintain water treatment plants and pipes, and they lack funding to carry out proper treatment on the water, which comes from springs in old coal mines.

“What is pretty clear is that a lot of these small communities, especially in lower-income areas, have a real problem ensuring compliance or even treating the water,” said Erik Olson, director of the health program at the National Resources Defense Council. “A lot of these smaller communities, they don’t even have the wherewithal to apply for available funding.”

Drinking water quality is often dependent on the wealth and racial makeup of communities, according to News21’s analysis. Small, poor communities and neglected urban areas are sometimes left to fend for themselves with little help from state and federal governments.



Contaminated water runs toward the Grand Calumet River and Lake Michigan, the source of drinking water for East Chicago, Ind. (Photo: Michael M. Santiago/News21)

In recent years, drinking water crises in minority communities, like Flint, Michigan, and East Chicago, Indiana, made national news when old pipes leached lead into the water of thousands for

months before state and federal officials responded. In Texas, Corpus Christi's water system shut down for nearly four days in December because of a chemical spill at an asphalt plant, closing schools and businesses throughout the predominantly Hispanic city.

"These are not isolated incidences, the Flints of the world or the Corpus Christis or the East Chicagos," said Manuel Teodoro, a researcher at Texas A&M University who co-authored a report on the disproportionate effect of drinking water quality problems on poor minority communities.

"These incidents are getting media attention in a way that they didn't a few years ago, but the patterns that we see in the data suggest that problems with drinking water quality are not just randomly distributed in the population — that there is a systemic bias out there."



A water main break forced Tallulah, La., to completely shut off water to residents. (Photo: Michael M. Santiago, NEWS21)

Many residents of Tallulah, La., where 77% of the population is black and 40% lives in poverty, have turned to bottled water as their crumbling utility failed to keep water free of toxic disinfectant byproducts. Systems serving thousands of others in predominantly black communities around the state have struggled to keep these carcinogens out of their taps. Many Latinos along the U.S.-Mexico border who live in unincorporated low-income rural areas lack the resources to maintain their systems or don't have access to treated water.

Although the EPA sets minimum drinking water standards, almost all state governments are in charge of testing requirements and operator licensing, creating a maze of regulations and protections that differ from state to state.

A 2011 Government Accountability Office report found the EPA's database isn't complete, with some states incorrectly reporting or failing to report many violations. The EPA also hasn't created a rule for a new contaminant since 2000.

Millions of Americans are also exposed to suspect chemicals the EPA and state agencies don't regulate. Two of these chemicals, perfluorinated compounds PFOA and PFOS, remain unregulated after decades of use as an ingredient in firefighting foam, Teflon and other consumer products. These perfluorinated compounds have been linked to low birth weights in children, cancer and liver tissue damage, according to the EPA.

"When we talk about upgrading our nation's infrastructure, we should work with states and localities to identify critical water infrastructure needs and support their efforts to modernize outdated systems," said EPA spokesperson Liz Bowman.

The EPA did not make any officials available to News21 for an interview.

While most Americans get their water from local utilities, the 15 million homes with private wells, especially in rural areas, are vulnerable to the same contamination issues but are not required to

install treatment systems. The limited data available shows wells in many parts of the country draw groundwater containing dangerous levels of toxins from naturally occurring elements and man-made sources.



Water in La Union, N.M., had tested above the limit for arsenic since 2009. Residents fill at the local filling station. (Photo: Maria Esquinca, NEWS21)

Small systems, big problems

The majority of local water systems serve fewer than 5,000 people, accounting for a majority of the 97,800 instances when regulators cited water systems for having too many contaminants during the past decade.

For example, Wolfforth and Brady, two small communities in western and central Texas, received the most citations for water quality in the U.S.

Wolfforth, where the tallest structure is a blue and white water tower, racked up 362 violations in 10 years for arsenic and fluoride in its groundwater source. Since arsenic can cause cancer and fluoride can weaken bones, the contaminants required a rapid solution.

The city of 4,400 is rapidly growing like much of suburban Texas, but City Manager Darrell Newsom said it still took time to find funding for the \$8.5 million water treatment project.

“There’s a lot of angst about how much money we spent, and there was a tremendous amount of angst about how long it took,” Newsom said. “It was just so long and so much money that we had tied up for so long.”



Eli Copeland, 6, wears a nose plug when he showers, and he drinks bottled water in Terrebonne Parish, La. (Photo: Jasmine Spearing-Bowen, NEWS21)

Even though the system is running, the city will send water notices to residents until the system doesn't violate the arsenic standard for a full year. Many continue to buy bottled water instead of drinking from the tap.

"We need some more clean water," said Shreejana Malla, who co-owns a convenience store in Wolfforth with her husband. "So I would want them to, as soon as possible, to get the clean water. I don't feel comfortable taking a shower, but we've got to take a shower."

The city got a loan and raised water rates about 30% to pay for the upgrades, Newsom said.

Generally, systems rely on customers to pay for upgrades, presenting a challenge for small communities who have fewer people to charge for water. Areas without growth are often forced to choose between keeping up with maintenance costs or keeping water payments low. The EPA and state governments provide some grants and low-interest loans, but there isn't enough money available to meet most needs, and they often require complicated applications.

"The average person looks at (water) like electricity," said Alan Roberson, executive director of the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators. "They just want it to be there, and they want it to be at a fair price."

For instance, 260 miles southeast of Wolfforth is Brady, a city proudly known as the "Heart of Texas." The community is trying to secure funding from the state's Economically Distressed Areas Program for a \$22 million water system project to get rid of the underground radium contaminating its drinking water. This fund only has \$50 million left, and Brady is not the only city in contention for the money, leaving some concerned about the future of Brady's water if it doesn't receive part of the last allocation.

"If we don't get it this time and the state doesn't reauthorize that program, I don't know what we'll do," said Amy Greer, a sixth-generation farmer at the locally operated Winters Family Beef. "I really want our state legislators to know how terrible it is that they are not renewing a program that will help small rural communities face and tackle these kind of massive health and safety problems, and I'm just ashamed of them."

Despite funding uncertainty and mounting pressure from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the state's drinking water authority, the city is determined to get clean water for its 5,400 residents.

"The answer is solving the water problem because EPA and TCEQ has placed a timeline on us," Mayor Tony Groves said. "If we don't do that, there's always the risk that they could come in and say, 'OK, you lose your water system, and we're gonna pay somebody to operate your water system better than you're operating it and you're gonna pay for it.'"



Araceli Silva's sons drilled and installed a well in the backyard of her home in Wall Lane, Ariz. (Photo: Maria Esquinca, NEWS21)

What's in the water?

While many communities with small systems, like Wolfforth and Brady, struggle to address contamination issues, thousands more of these communities aren't sure if their water is safe because their systems don't test properly or report the results.

In southern West Virginia coal country, a number of communities failed to test their water hundreds of times after the miners that operated them left when their camps shut down. Many of these systems are now run by the residents.

In Garwood, a 55-person Wyoming County town surrounded by coal mines, the community water system stopped testing in 2014.

"Everybody just up and quit," said lifelong resident Jessica Griffith, who drank untreated water from an old coal mine for nine months before learning it wasn't being tested. "There was no warning, no nothing. Nobody handed it over to anybody else."

The stay-at-home mom and her neighbors say maintenance seems like a full-time job, and they can only afford to patch up leaks and fix busted pipes.

"We've just been trying to keep the water flowing because we don't have the money to treat it," Griffith said. "We don't know how to treat it."

Two hours north, Kanawha Falls Community Water in Fayette County was cited for not testing or reporting more than 2,000 times in 10 years, the most in the country. No one is sure when the system stopped being maintained, but residents say they experience the consequences daily. Joe Underwood, who had skull surgery after a four-wheeler accident, said he showers with a cap after doctors told him the town's water gave him two infections near his brain.



Kanawha Falls resident Joe Underwood had skull surgery after an ATV crash. He uses a shower cap to avoid infections. (Photo: Rachel Konieczny, NEW21)

"The old-style ways of getting water is not healthy," Underwood said. "And I'm meaning that for people that have serious injuries. I'm meaning that for little babies. I'm meaning that for anybody that has any kind of health problems."

The unincorporated community relies on volunteers like Bobby Kirby, nominated by his neighbors to be water system treasurer, to pour chlorine into the storage tanks to disinfect the water. After years of not testing and reporting, Kirby says the state threatened to arrest him for failing to turn in paperwork.

"They came here and said they was going to lock me up," he said. "Well, I told them, 'You can lock me up if you want to, but I don't own it. I'm just a property owner that wants water.'"

The West Virginia Infrastructure and Jobs Development Council, the agency responsible for improving infrastructure in the state, announced several projects to link communities like Kanawha Falls and Garwood to surrounding city water systems. Kanawha Falls' \$1.8 million extension is scheduled to be completed by the end of the summer.

While some systems in West Virginia have no operators, other small systems throughout the country don't have the money to ensure full-time maintenance.



Bobby Kirby sometimes performs maintenance on the Civil War-era system of Kanawha Falls, W.Va. (Photo: Rachel Konieczny, NEW21)

Scotts Mills, a city of 370 tucked away in the tree-lined foothills of northwest Oregon, cannot afford to hire a full-time staff for its water system and relies on local volunteers to step up.

“We rely on a neighbor complaining about an odor or something like that. We really don't have any staff to drive around and look,” said Dick Bielenberg, the city councilman in charge of water. “If there's a water leak or something like that we'll take care of that, sometimes with volunteer labor, sometimes we'll hire an outside contractor, depends upon how big the project is.”

Resident Jake Ehredt volunteered to be the water commissioner when he moved into community three years ago. However, Ehredt is also a full-time water system operator for the neighboring city of Molalla and said he can only spend an hour or two a day in Scotts Mills for routine checks. While he is away, residents with water problems are directed to call Bielenberg by a sticky note on the city hall door.

“One thing we have out here is contact with our elected officials. We know them,” said Ron Hays, whose family has lived in and around Scotts Mills since 1899. “If the water main breaks, you know who to call.”

Though surveys from the Oregon Health Authority showed the city's water system hasn't violated any safety standards, Bielenberg says the city needs a plan for at least the next 20 years should any problems arise.

“There's not a lot of money so you learn to get by and improvise,” Ehredt said. “We are going to work on updating little small things.”

Replacement Era

According to the EPA, most of the \$384 billion needed to keep the country's water systems safe should go toward upgrading pipes buried underground that distribute the water — out of sight and mind to most Americans until one of them bursts.

“The plants are visible. If EPA makes a regulation, and you have to comply with it, then the utility manager can go to the board and say, ‘Hey, I have to do this, EPA is making me do it,’ and then get the money to build the treatment improvements,” said Roberson, of the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators. “It’s a little harder, then, when you’re talking about the pipes that are buried in the ground because you don’t see the pipes. You don’t know if you have a problem until you get a big leak or a big geyser comes out in the street.”



East Chicago, Ind. The city has long been surrounded by various industries, with many contributing to contamination. (Photo: Michael M. Santiago, NEWS21)

Even if water service is not disrupted by a pipe break, millions of miles of lead pipes in the U.S. are at risk of leaching the toxic metal into drinking water without proper oversight from system operators. In Milwaukee, about 70,000 homes are connected to the city’s water system with aging lead pipes, many of which run under low-income and African-American communities in the city’s north-side neighborhoods. Many residents fear this has contributed to the city’s high rate of lead poisoning among children.

Pipes that leak or break can also introduce bacteria and chemicals from the surrounding soil after the water has already been treated.

Government officials acknowledge the daunting challenges ahead for water utilities. In the final months of the Obama administration, the EPA’s Office of Water published a report highlighting aging infrastructure, unregulated contaminants and financial support for small and poor communities as top concerns for drinking water quality going forward.

“The actions proposed here go far beyond what EPA alone can do; all levels of government, utilities, the private sector and the public each have critical roles to play,” the report said. “Utilities ultimately must take many of the critical actions needed to strengthen drinking water safety, and communities must be actively engaged in supporting these actions.”

Industry groups are sounding the alarm about the bill coming due for water infrastructure as it enters a “replacement era.”

The American Society of Civil Engineers gave the U.S. a “D” grade for the quality of its drinking water systems based on an evaluation of their safety, condition, capacity and other criteria. Of the 25 states with individual grades, none scored higher than a “C+.” Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Arkansas and Alaska all received “D” grades.

The American Water Works Association estimated water systems will need about \$1 trillion in investment during the next 25 years just to maintain and expand water service. This price tag doesn’t include the costs associated with getting rid of lead service lines or upgrading water treatment plants.

“A part of that, not all of it, but a part of it, is a lack of investment when it should have started earlier,” Steve Via, American Water Works Association director of federal relations, said about the upgrades necessary in coming years.



Residents of La Union, N.M., keep plenty of bottles of water on hand after officials discovered arsenic in their water. (Photo: Maria Esquinca, NEWS21)

Methodology

News21 analyzed 680,000 violations from a 10-year period starting Jan. 1, 2007, in the EPA’s Safe Drinking Water Information System. The database only contains active community water systems in U.S. states and tribal lands because they are the most likely to serve homes. The EPA data also shows how many people were affected by violations. The EPA has acknowledged this database might not reflect all violations that have occurred and some information may be incorrect.

The violations included two types: health-based violations and monitoring/reporting violations. Health-based violations are instances when water was found to be contaminated or not properly treated for contaminants. The story refers to these violations as water quality violations.

Monitoring/reporting violations occur when a water system either fails to test for a contaminant or report its test result to the state and customers.

This report is part of a project on drinking water contamination in the United States produced by the Carnegie-Knight News21 program. For the complete Troubled Water project, visit troubledwater.news21.com.

East Bay Times

First-ever water tax proposed to tackle unsafe drinking water in California



AP Photo/John Locher

In this Sept. 18, 2015 photo, a man loads a truck on farmland near Fresno, Calif. U.S. officials with the Geological Survey's Sacramento office and elsewhere believe the amount of uranium increased in Central Valley drinking-water supplies over the last 150 years with the spread of farming.

By [Katy Murphy](#) | kmurphy@bayareanewsgroup.com |

PUBLISHED: **August 23, 2017** at 10:49 am | UPDATED: August 24, 2017 at 3:51 am

SACRAMENTO — For the first time Californians would pay a tax on drinking water — 95 cents per month — under legislation aimed at fixing hundreds of public water systems with unsafe tap water.

Senate Bill 623, backed by a strange-bedfellows coalition of the agricultural lobby and environmental groups but opposed by water districts, would generate \$2 billion over the next 15 years to clean up contaminated groundwater and improve faulty water systems and wells. The problem is most pervasive in rural areas with agricultural runoff.

“My message is short and direct: We are not Flint, Michigan,” co-author Sen. Robert Hertzberg, D-Van Nuys, said at a Wednesday rally outside the Capitol, where demonstrators held signs reading “Clean water is not a luxury” and “Water is a human right.”

Ironically, many Californians are more aware of the crisis in Flint — where state and local officials in 2015 told residents about lead contamination in the drinking water, after claiming it was safe to drink — than about the water problems in their home state, said the measure's main author, Sen. Bill Monning, D-Monterey. He called this “a pivotal time in our state's history to do the right thing.”

SB 623 has been moving through the Legislature for months, but was amended Monday to include the tax on water for both homes and businesses. It also imposes fees on farms and dairies, roughly \$30 million annually, to address some of the contamination caused by fertilizers and other chemicals. Because it includes new taxes, the proposal will need a two-thirds vote in each house to pass, which supporters concede will be a battle.

Still, Monning has been able to forge the unusual alliance of farmers and environmental groups, which rarely agree on public policy. He also has the support of at least one Republican lawmaker: Sen. Andy Vidak, a cherry farmer who said his Central Valley district — which includes Hanford and parts of Fresno and Bakersfield — is the epicenter of the drinking-water problem.

“This is very, very important to my constituents,” he said after the rally, as some of them began chanting on the Capitol steps. “This is one of the most important things in my district.”

But water agencies say taxing drinking water sets a dangerous precedent and that the bill would turn them into state tax collectors. “Water is essential to life. Should we tax drinking water? We don’t think so,” said Cindy Tuck, a spokeswoman for the Association of California Water Agencies.

Sue Stephenson, a spokeswoman for the Dublin San Ramon Services District, said she supported the intent of the proposal — potable drinking water for all — but argued that lawmakers should use the money in existing coffers.

“The whole purpose of the general fund is to help take care of disadvantaged communities,” she said. “There’s no reason that they could not also fund communities that need access to drinking water.”

Marie Barajas, of San Jose, had a similar reaction. “That’s not fair. We’re not responsible for that,” she said. “That’s why we pay taxes.”

Monning, however, argues that the general fund isn’t a reliable funding source and that the proposed tax on households, amounting to roughly \$11.40 per year, is negligible. “You’re not going to notice it on your water bill,” he said.

The bill is now relegated with hundreds of others in the “suspense file” of the Assembly Appropriations Committee. The panel must decide by Sept. 1 to move it to the Assembly floor for a vote.

Selerina Chavez took a day off from work to drive from the Kern County city of Arvin for the rally. She said she hoped lawmakers would try to fix the problem posing health risks to her family and her neighbors, many of whom are farm workers or living on fixed incomes.

When she moved from Ventura County more than 20 years ago, she said, it never occurred to her that the water would be unsafe for her family to drink. They drank it for years, she said, before she learned a few years ago that it contained unsafe levels of arsenic.

“I thought about my children,” she said in Spanish. “How many years have we been drinking this water?”

In addition to her regular water bill, she spends \$40 per week buying drinking water. She also buys water for cooking.

Now, she said, “I have three water bills.”

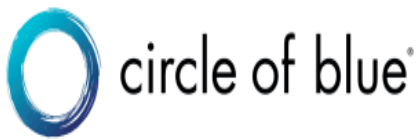
SENATE BILL 623

What is it? SB 623, by Sen. Bill Monning, D-Monterey, would generate \$2 billion over 15 years for a Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, which would provide emergency water and longer-term system fixes for hundreds of communities whose tap water doesn’t meet safe drinking-water standards.

Where would the money come from? The proposal would generate roughly \$110 million per year through a 95-cent monthly fee on home water bills as well as taxes on businesses of up to \$10 per month. Another \$30 million would come from higher fees on agricultural and dairy businesses, industries whose chemicals contribute to the problem of contaminated groundwater.

Who’s for it? Who’s against it? The bill is backed by the agriculture and dairy lobbies, as well as by a long list of environmental, social justice and civic groups — an unusual combo. Water districts are against the bill, saying that taxing water users creates a bad precedent and that collecting the money would be burdensome.

Will it pass? If the Assembly Appropriations Committee moves the bill to the floor, it needs a two-thirds vote of each house, which is always a challenge. What’s more, Assembly Republican Leader Chad Mayes has faced [intense blow-back](#) for his bipartisan collaboration to extend California’s landmark climate program, called “cap and trade.” But SB 623 does have one Republican co-author: Sen. Andy Vidak, of Hanford.

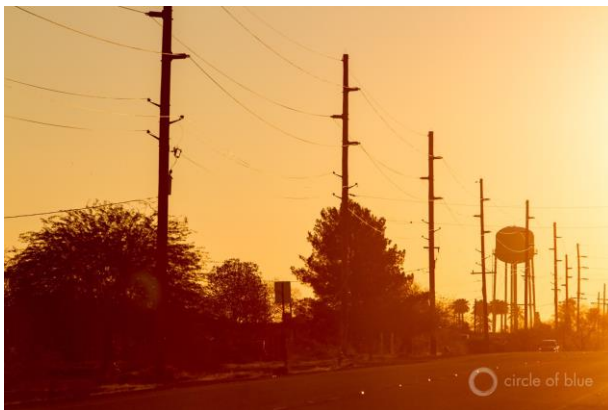


[WaterNews](#)

When It Comes To Water Service How Expensive Is Too Expensive?

August 24, 2017/in [Water Management](#), [Water News](#), [Water Pricing](#) /by [Brett Walton](#)

As rates rise, water authorities question longstanding affordability measurement.



Sunset colors the sky a pastel orange above a water tower on the Gila River Nation, in central Arizona. Photo © J. Carl Ganter / Circle of Blue

By Brett Walton, Circle of Blue

Earlier this year, Manny Teodoro, a Texas A&M University associate professor, sat in a meeting with a committee that advises the Phoenix Water Department on rates to discuss the increasingly fraught relationship between household water bills and the ability of residents to pay for water service.

Teodoro, a scholar who evaluates the consequences of public policy, was developing a method to measure the financial burden of water bills on the poor. Phoenix officials wanted fresh insight they could perhaps incorporate in aid programs and rates.

At some point the conversation took a slight, but revealing, turn. Affordability is a comparative concept, the place where income and expenditures cross. Teodoro was talking about measuring that relationship. In the water utility industry few tasks are as perplexing or misunderstood as gauging which customers can afford to pay their water bills and how much they can pay.

The committee members, though, wanted a definition. Household incomes at the economic bottom have stagnated. How many people will not be able to pay?

“Are our rates affordable?” they asked, posing a question that has become a defining issue for U.S. water utilities in the second decade of the 21st century.

Teodoro, reflecting on his work, instead redirected the query. “It’s up to you, not me,” he replied. “I’m showing you how to measure it.”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of households earning less than \$US 15,000 per year grew more between 2000 and 2015 than any equivalent segment of the income distribution. At the same time water rates, driven by the cost to maintain or replace water treatment plants and delivery pipes, are rising at double or triple the rate of inflation. The trend, for booming cities and sleepy villages alike, shows no sign of slowing. The need to measure, define, and understand what is meant by affordable water, rates experts say, has never been more imperative.

Teodoro is a candid critic of established metrics and one of a number of researchers, utility officials, and government representatives who are pushing the industry toward a more nuanced analysis. That means tussling with questions — like the definition of affordability — that are in many ways philosophical, which is novel thinking for utilities that are accustomed to ticking boxes that were drawn by regulators.

“People are used to having a standard,” Teodoro told Circle of Blue. “The tendency is to look at the standard like a checklist without thinking through what affordability means. What is affordable is a normative question. In a democratic society it is up to our governing institutions to decide what that means. It might mean different things in different places.”

Utilities, being pushed into a larger social services role by City Hall and advocacy groups, are coming at the question from several angles. Phoenix is testing an analytical approach developed by Teodoro that incorporates disposable income and local wages. The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, which serves the Cleveland metro area, and the water department for Raleigh, the capital of North Carolina, are using fine-grained U.S. Census data to define more clearly which households need financial aid.

Even Congress, where water affordability legislation is now a perennial topic, has taken action. Lawmakers ordered the National Academy of Public Administration, a research group chartered by Congress, to study alternative ways of measuring household water affordability. The report is due at the end of September.

A common theme among these endeavors is rejection of the prevailing wisdom, which is a two-decade-old standard used by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to assess the cost to water utilities of meeting federal pollution-control requirements. That is the standard that Teodoro and others want to upend.

The Old Way

When they fail to meet Clean Water Act obligations to cut the flow of untreated sewage and dirty street runoff into rivers, the EPA often requires cities to install system upgrades that can run into the billions of dollars for a large metro. Part of the regulatory process is a financial analysis, which assesses the community’s ability to pay for the improvements. If the best technology is too much of a burden, the community can get a waiver to use a less costly fix.

The EPA's method, put in place in 1997, is rudimentary, a club not a scalpel. The agency compares the median household income (MHI) for the utility's service area to the area's average sewer bill. If the average bill after sewer system upgrades is not above two percent of MHI, the community passes the residential affordability part of the financial test. A similar metric is applied for drinking water improvements, except that the bar for "high" financial impact is set at 2.5 percent of MHI.

That community-level standard has taken on a life of its own. It has been applied broadly — mistakenly, some say — as an indicator of water and sewer bill affordability for individuals and households.

Critics of the EPA standard — both in its intended and unintended uses — are easy to find. Teodoro argues that MHI is used only because it is "convenient and conventional," and it results in "lazy and deceptive" analysis. Jason Mumm, a rates analyst with JMa Municipal Advisers, a consultancy based in Colorado, says that the standard is a "ham-fisted" way of estimating financial capacity that ignores demographic and economic distributions that vary from city to city.

The MHI metric has four flaws, Teodoro asserts. One, it looks at average demand across the community instead of essential household needs. Average demand includes water that nourishes grassy yards as well as water consumption by the rich, who tend to use more. Average demand, in effect, inflates the amount of water a household needs. Utility leaders who have looked closely at the issue agree. "We don't want to define affordability as being able to afford a lawn," Kathryn Sorensen, Phoenix Water Department director, told Circle of Blue.

A second flaw is that using median income obscures the financial pressure on poor residents. Like for average demand, median income is a balance point between a community's richest and poorest. A high median income can veil a large group of poorer residents.

Ed Buchan, a water department analyst for the City of Raleigh, recognizes this problem with MHI. "While the Raleigh service area overall is in good standing, there are highly stressed areas within the city," Buchan told Circle of Blue. "If you used median household income for the whole service area, no one would qualify as stressed."

Third, the EPA measure ignores the local cost of living, which varies widely within and between states. If other goods are cheap, then a higher water bill may not be as debilitating.

Lastly, the numbers used for the financial assessment — two percent of MHI for sewer bills and 2.5 percent for drinking water — appear to be somewhat arbitrary. A [white paper](#) prepared for the National Association of Clean Water Agencies by the engineering firm CH2M Hill notes that MHI as a measure of financial capacity originated in the Farm Home Loan program in the 1970s. Teodoro has found little documentation on why two percent was selected as the break point.

"It appears to be a pure 'golden number,' one with no empirical or theoretical rationale at all," he said. "It's become a number that people point to in an appeal to authority."

There are more detailed records for the roots of the drinking water standard. The EPA [considered a range of values](#), between 1.5 percent of MHI and three percent. The agency settled on 2.5 percent after looking at national-level averages for household spending on transportation, energy, telephone service, entertainment, and other categories, as well as at the cost of using faucet filters

or bottled water for in-home drinking water. The agency reckoned that 2.5 percent was less than spending on home heating and air conditioning and more than the cost of filters or bottled water.

The EPA press office said their financial specialists were not available for an interview to discuss the origins and application of the MHI standard.

An Affordability Metric That Focuses on the Poor

Teodoro is poised to address the deficiencies with fresh analysis. He submitted [a paper that outlines his methods](#) and applies them to the 25 largest U.S. cities to an academic journal. The paper is in a second round of the peer-review process.



Migrant communities in southern California have to rely on unsafe groundwater supplies or drive to access clean supplies. A water filtration station at a mobile home park in the Coachella Valley removes arsenic from groundwater. It was paid for largely with state grants. Photo © J. Carl Ganter / Circle of Blue

Teodoro employs two approaches. One equates water bills with labor, tallying the number of hours at the local minimum wage that a person would need to work in order to pay for a monthly water bill at 50 gallons per day, which is an estimate of water needed for basic hygiene, drinking, and cooking. Cities can adapt this measure, but Teodoro proposes eight hours of minimum-wage labor as a starting point for discussion.

The second, called the affordability ratio, compares a water bill to disposable income for households at the twentieth percentile of the income distribution, meaning the bottom fifth, which is where affordability problems begin to be most apparent.

To calculate disposable income he subtracts essential expenses such as food, housing, energy, taxes, and health care. Then he calculates a monthly water bill for a household using 50 gallons per person per day. The water bill is then divided by disposable income to get the affordability ratio. Teodoro suggests that water bills are affordable for households at the twentieth percentile if they consume no more than 10 percent of disposable income. The method is, in fact, a template. Cities can fiddle with the input variables to match their assumptions about what affordability means.

There are drawbacks, though. The measurements do not work for renters, who often do not directly pay their water bill. Also, the calculations can be complex because cities need data on

household income and expenditures. “It’s really difficult to pin down necessary versus discretionary spending,” said Mumm, who provided comments to Teodoro on the paper. Nonetheless, Mumm endorses alternative measurements and said that Teodoro is one of the sharper people thinking about the topic.

“Affordability is one of the most important issues for our industry and a defining issue for some time to come,” Mumm said.

Mumm, when he worked as an analyst for MHW Global, an engineering firm, had a hand in developing an affordability measurement of his own. Called WARi, the tool pairs utility billing data with financial data sorted by census block. Census blocks are the smallest unit of measurement in the federal survey, and they encompass several thousand people.

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District used WARi to identify which neighborhoods to target for enrollment in the district’s bill assistance program, which offers a 40 percent discount to customers who are below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The response rate from customers increased significantly, according to Ken Duplay, the chief financial officer.

Use What Is Available

Because it’s handy, utilities still refer to MHI in their affordability planning. But sometimes in more nuanced ways than comparing it to a bill averaged across the entire utility service area.

Last December, when it approved its first program to provide water bill aid to poor customers, the Raleigh City Council wanted to know how many people might need financial assistance. The city, after all, had only so many dollars it could expend.

The water department developed a needs assessment based, in part, on the EPA methodology. The department used median household income data — but for census blocks, not for the city as a whole.

The department calculated an average household water and sewer bill based on a city-wide average of five hundred cubic feet (3,740 gallons) per month. Staff then compared the average bill to the median household income for each census block. If the bill was more than 4.5 percent of income — a figure based on the maligned EPA standard — then it was deemed unaffordable and the households in that block could qualify for bill assistance.

By looking at census block data, the department was able to see the scope of the problem in detail. The analysis showed that some 20,000 households, or roughly 10 percent in the city service area, qualified for the subsidy.

“It was a sobering number,” Buchan said.

Congress Orders Fresh Ideas

Perhaps the most anticipated assessment is a [pending report](#) from the National Academy of Public Administration, a body chartered by Congress to explore fundamental public policy matters. The report is designed to assist the EPA in revising its community affordability guidelines, if the agency chooses to do so.

Mandated as part of the 2016 federal budget resolution, the report is due to Congress in late September and will be released to the public soon thereafter, according to Brenna Isman, the project director.

A five-member panel, each of whom is an academy fellow, will write the report with the help of NAPA's professional staff. Panel members are either academics or local government officials. The chair, Stan Czerwinski, is the chief operating officer of the National Governors Association.

The panel has convened four times, Isman told Circle of Blue, but its report will be based on the grunt work of NAPA's professional staff, work that includes hundreds of interviews with water sector leaders, several roundtable discussions, and [industry surveys](#). The surveys asked whether the two percent MHI figure is appropriate, whether it should be replaced, and what its successor should be. Roundtable participants included water industry trade groups and local government organizations: National Association of Clean Water Agencies, National Association of Counties, National League of Cities, U.S. Council of Mayors, Natural Resources Defense Council, American Water Works Association, National Rural Water Association, and others.

The U.S. Council of Mayors has been one of the most vocal groups lobbying the EPA to change how it evaluates affordability. Local and state governments, after all, account for [more than 95 percent](#) of capital spending on water infrastructure. "They're dealing with it on the front line," Mumm said. At their annual meeting in July 2016, the mayors adopted [a resolution](#) that encourages the EPA to be more comprehensive in its evaluation of a community's ability to pay by including all federal mandates, and not just for water, in the assessment.

A Matter of Priorities

Mumm says that even though the EPA numbers are flawed, there still is value in providing guidance to water utilities as they take on unfamiliar tasks.

"Manny [Teodoro] doesn't like the two percent figure, but from a policy perspective we need something that gives a sense that the cost of service is getting up there, a barometer if you will," Mumm said. "I think the EPA needs to have something that is an effective tool: 'Is this too much to ask for a community?' The question is how to change how the EPA measures it, to get a better barometer."

Sorensen, the Phoenix Water Department director, says that though affordability will require local solutions, collective leadership is also necessary: "It is incumbent on the water industry as a whole to come up with guidelines that are reasonable."

Teodoro, for his part, recognizes that getting an industry to change its ways will be a challenge. If better measurements are a means to that end, then he has a path laid out. After profiling 25 cities for the journal article, Teodoro wants to expand the analysis to cover several hundred U.S. utilities. He'll provide the measurement, but utilities will have to decide where, in the relationship between prices and incomes, to mark the transition from affordable to unaffordable.

"I'm evangelizing right now," Teodoro added. "Getting people to break habits is difficult. It will take time but more utilities are looking so they're taking it seriously."

California's drift away from levees continues

By Staff and wire reports

Posted **Aug 25, 2017** at 7:50 PM Updated Aug 25, 2017 at 7:50 PM

After more than a century of building levees higher to hold back its rivers, California took another step Friday toward a flood-control policy that aims to give raging rivers more room to spread out instead.

The plan, adopted by the flood-control board for the Central Valley, covers a 500-mile swath from Mount Shasta to Bakersfield that includes the state's two largest rivers and the United States' richest agricultural region. It emphasizes flood plains, wetlands and river bypasses as well as levees.

The plan is [especially important for Stockton](#), which sits at the bottom of the San Joaquin River watershed. Floods in the watershed are expected to worsen by about 60 to 80 percent due to climate change, meaning a severe future flood could kill nearly 900 people, according to the state, and cause \$9 billion in damage.

To help alleviate that threat, the plan includes a new flood bypass at Paradise Cut, a widely supported local project that would better protect downstream Lathrop and Stockton. The plan also includes the restoration of flows through blighted Mormon Slough and the improvement of levees along the western edges of Stockton.

It does not include all that local officials hoped for, though, including more substantial improvements to the San Joaquin River levee that runs from Weston Ranch all the way to Lathrop, protecting 46,000 people and safeguarding facilities including the County Jail and hospital. The plan appears to "obstruct rather than facilitate increased flood protection" for that area, Stockton attorney Dante Nomellini wrote in comments to the state earlier this year.

Backers say the shift in thinking toward giving rivers room to breathe will better handle the rising seas and heavier rain of climate change.

The idea: "Spread it out, slow it down, sink it in, give the river more room," said Kris Tjernell, special assistant for water policy at California's Natural Resources Agency.

Handled right, the effort will allow farmers and wildlife — including native species harmed by the decades of concrete-heavy flood-control projects — to make maximum use of the rivers and adjoining lands as well, supporters say.

They point to Northern California's Yolo Bypass, which this winter again protected California's capital, Sacramento, from near-record rains. Wetlands and flood plains in the area allow rice farmers, migratory birds and baby salmon all to thrive there.

For farmers, the plan offers help moving to crops more suitable to seasonally flooded lands along rivers, as well as payments for lending land to flood control and habitat support.

Farmers, environmental leaders and sporting and fishing groups joined in praising the plan Friday, a rarity in California's fierce water politics. "Savor the moment," Justin Fredrickson of the California Farm Bureau joked to the flood board.

San Joaquin-area flood control officials have praised certain aspects of the plan, like the Paradise Cut bypass, but have been critical of others and say their formal comments to state officials are not reflected in the plan approved Friday.

Five years in negotiation, the flood proposal moves away from "two overarching themes in the history of our flood management. One has been build the levees bigger and get the water out" to the ocean. "Another theme has been don't talk to each other," said Rene Henery, state science director for the Trout Unlimited conservation organization.

California's Central Valley before Western settlement annually transformed into an inland sea in the rainy season. Settlers transformed the Valley, building levees along the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers to create land for farm fields and cities.

The state doesn't have the funding for the nearly \$20 billion in projects envisioned by the plan, including thousands of acres of proposed new wetlands along the San Joaquin. But the outline is meant to guide work and funding, including \$89 million the state announced for Central Valley wetlands earlier this week.

East Bay Times

East Bay water supplier eyes revamping rates to promote conservation

The Contra Costa Water District is considering revamping its water rate structure in the Central County to add price tiers to promote conservation. (Gary Reyes/ Mercury News)

By [Denis Cuff](mailto:dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com) | dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

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CONCORD — Responding to calls to continue conservation after the drought, the Contra Costa Water District is considering revamping its rates to encourage saving water among 208,000 central county residents.

The district currently uses a uniform rate for household water, while also collecting an additional excess use charge on homes using more than 1,000 gallons a day and using more they did in 2013.

On Wednesday, district consultants urged the board to consider switching to tiered rates, which impose a progressively higher volume price as customers use larger amounts.

Two or three price tiers should be considered, the consultants said. A three-tier price system would provide the biggest incentive for customers to save but also place the largest financial burden on high-volume users with large lots and landscaping, experts with Raftelis Financial Consultants Inc. told the water board.

Before drawing up rate proposals for public view, the water board said Wednesday it wants more information about how several rate options would affect bills of customers at various consumption levels.

“We want to reward conservation,” said board President Lisa Borba, of Concord, “and we don’t want to be unfair. We don’t want to penalize someone who has made the decision to have a large piece of property.”

The average central county household pays \$60.62 per month for 260 gallons of water a day in a territory that includes Concord, Clayton, Pleasant Hill, Pacheco and parts of Walnut Creek and Martinez.

The water board is investigating ways to revamp its rate structure for the first time in more than a decade in part because of the widespread calls for conservation during the drought.

“The world has changed since the drought,” Borba said. “We’re taking this very seriously and studying it very carefully.”

The goal of a rate overhaul isn't to collect more revenue but to reallocate how that the burden for payments is distributed among low, medium and big users, said Jennifer Allen, a district spokeswoman.

If the district approves three tiers, the consultants suggest that lowest price should go to households using 170 gallons per day or less, enough to provide 55 gallons per day of indoor use for each of three people.

The highest price in a third tier would be charged for water use in excess of 390 gallons per day, the consultants suggested.

If a two-tier structure were used, the consultants suggest the lowest price be charged for consuming less than 390 gallons per day.

After the district develops some detailed rate proposals, a series of public meetings and workshops will be announced and a formal report mailed out to customers. The revamped rates might be voted upon in early January, but no date is yet set.

The district also is reviewing whether rate changes are warranted for wholesale water supplies sold to local water systems in Antioch, Pittsburg, Oakley, Bay Point and Martinez.

Among other nearby water suppliers, the East Bay Municipal Utility District has a three-tier rate structure, and the Fremont-based Alameda County Water District has a single uniform rate.

East Bay Times

Sale of bankrupt hospital to owner of San Pablo Lytton Casino pending

The Lytton Rancheria would pay \$13 million for 8.3 acres that its attorney says will be used for parking

Doctors Medical Center is seen in San Pablo on May 7, 2014.

By [Tom Lochner](#) | tlochner@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

PUBLISHED: **September 8, 2017** at 7:55 am | UPDATED: September 8, 2017 at 12:17 pm

SAN PABLO — Officials of defunct Doctors Medical Center hope to soon complete a \$13 million sale of the hospital campus to the Lytton Rancheria, owner of the adjacent San Pablo Lytton Casino.

An attorney for the tribe said the property will be used for parking.

“It will take over two years to tear down the hospital buildings and construct the surface parking,” the attorney, Larry Stidham, said in an email this week. “There is a continuing need for patron and employee parking.”

The property for sale is about 8.3 acres of what used to be a 10.8-acre campus. In 2015, the West Contra Costa Healthcare District, which owns the bankrupt hospital, sold the city of San Pablo a 2.5-acre slice of the campus that the casino currently uses for parking under a 20-year easement that began in 2014.

The health care district board approved negotiating and executing a \$13 million purchase-and-sale agreement with the Lytton Rancheria in late 2016. The district is currently in bankruptcy proceedings in federal court. Interim CEO Kathy White has said the formalities of a sale are in progress, but she could not predict when the deal might close.

“Things are moving along although not as fast as we would like,” White said in an email this week. On Thursday, she added that leases for rooftop cell boxes are a complication — the property is supposed to be sold free and clear of all liens, claims, and encumbrances.

“But it’s all moving in the right direction,” she said.

Opened in 1954 as Brookside Hospital, DMC closed in April 2015 after years of multi-million-dollar deficits that officials blamed on a payer mix that included about 80 percent Medi-Cal and Medicare and 10 percent uninsured patients.

The campus property is zoned Commercial Mixed Use under a General Plan amendment approved by the San Pablo City Council in January 2016.

City Manager Matt Rodriguez, asked if he knew of any plans for the property, said in an email: “It would be very premature for the City to officially comment on any future development opportunities by the new prospective owner until the City actually receives a formal application for development for its due consideration and review, including meeting all necessary environmental review and permitting requirements.”

San Pablo Lytton Casino sits on the reservation of the Lytton Band of Pomo Indians, also known as the Lytton Rancheria, created by the U.S. Congress in 2000. The reservation consists of a tract a little over 9 acres in size along San Pablo Avenue at the intersection with San Pablo Dam Road. The San Pablo Lytton Casino is on part of the reservation, with the rest used for parking.

The casino, at 13255 San Pablo Ave. is open 24 hours, with more than 31,000 square feet of gaming space, including 1,450 gaming machines and 13 table and poker games, according to the website [Casino City](#). The property also has three restaurants.

The Lytton band also owns at least two nearby off-reservation properties, including the adjacent 1.7-acre former Moose Lodge site, which it bought in 2016, and an office building a short distance south of the casino.

Asked whether the tribe plans to expand its gambling operation on the reservation by shifting parking off-reservation to the adjacent hospital campus, Stidham said in an email:

“There are no plans to expand the current gaming footprint after the sale is complete.”

Asked whether the tribe might contemplate building upward and increasing the number of stories on the current building footprint, Stidham responded, “No such plans.”

Under current legislation, the tribe cannot offer Nevada-style “Class III” slot machines at the San Pablo Lytton Casino and is restricted to “Class II” electronic bingo machines.

San Francisco Chronicle

Town tapped out: Moraga's fiscal crisis shocks, baffles residents

By Alison Graham

September 15, 2017 Updated: September 15, 2017 6:00am



Photo: Santiago Mejia, The Chronicle

Image 1 of 3

The town of Moraga declared a fiscal emergency June 28.

After six months of searching for the perfect home, Lisa Koltun moved into a four-bedroom house in Moraga in July. Now she wonders if she will regret it.

She hadn't even unpacked her moving boxes when she learned that her new hometown had declared a fiscal emergency. She had attended dozens of open houses and no one mentioned the city's financial problems. She felt blindsided.

"I'm shocked. I'm dismayed. I'm scared to death," she said. "I just spent my life savings on a house here."

With a property tax bill of \$19,000 a year, she worries that the city will ask for more tax dollars.

It's no wonder no one mentioned the fiscal crisis to Koltun. In a sleepy residential community whose council meetings rarely draw more than a dozen people, it was hardly the talk of town.

But now, residents have bombarded online message boards with their questions and concerns — and they packed a recent town hall meeting to find out why the city that has passed a balanced budget every year is suddenly in crisis.

Residents who paid attention to town hall matters understood Moraga wasn't drawing a ton of revenue. But things didn't seem dire either: On June 14, the council approved a 6 percent salary increase for all town employees. Two weeks later, at an otherwise routine meeting, the council declared the fiscal emergency.

The only resident in the audience was Seth Freeman, a regular attendee who is a vocal critic of the town's management. He waited two hours — the council first discussed a playground and then a town poet laureate — so he could get three minutes at the podium.

“If we are about to declare a fiscal emergency, then I think we should act as though we have an emergency,” he said. “I think it's very inconsistent to be declaring a fiscal emergency and spending this nonessential money (on a park) on the same meeting date.”

Freeman posted their decision on the neighborhood social network Nextdoor, and residents responded with confusion and anger.

Since the declaration, tensions are rising between council members and Moraga residents as they demand answers about the town's budget and spending, particularly the salary increases.

The raises helped keep Moraga's wages competitive with other cities, said Amy Cunningham, Moraga's administrative services director.

But some Moraga residents are beginning to question the town government's staffing.

Moraga, with a population of about 17,000, has 36 full-time employees. Seventeen of them make a six-figure salary, and personnel costs account for nearly 64 percent of Moraga's operating budget each year.

Other cities in Contra Costa County about the size of Moraga have more employees, but use far less of their operating budgets on salaries and benefits. Pinole, with 18,946 residents, has about 100 full-time employees and uses 24 percent of its budget on personnel.

Similarly, the city of Orinda, with a population of 17,643, has about 40 employees whose salaries and benefits account for about 14 percent of the overall budget.

The Town Council has complained it has a revenue problem. Cunningham said the town [isn't earning enough money](#) because Proposition 13 keeps its property tax revenue stagnant and the lack of business growth keeps sales taxes low.

Adding to its problems, Moraga faced a string of catastrophes over the past year — a 15-foot sinkhole and a crumbling bridge — that total \$5 million in repairs. Those costs all but drained the town's reserve fund, which officials say is what prompted the emergency declaration.

With the emergency declaration in place, the town can hold a special election asking voters to pass a tax measure to increase revenues. Moraga needs to rebuild its dwindling reserve funds and start repairing the tangle of 40-year-old storm drains running underneath the streets, officials say.

Some residents, including Freeman, think the town should cut back salaries before pursuing a tax measure.

Other California cities that have declared fiscal emergencies have taken similar routes. La Mirada (Los Angeles County), which declared an emergency in 2012, cut the city's workforce by 27 percent. Montebello (Los Angeles County), which declared an emergency in May, imposed a hiring freeze on all city departments except police and fire.

Freeman suggested that the town cut back on spending, and wants the council to rescind the emergency declaration.

"I think it's bad for the town's image and reputation," he said. "It takes away the pride of ownership and of being a Moraga resident."

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Marin Independent Journal

Mill Valley, Southern Marin fire agencies explore sharing chief post



Mill Valley and Southern Marin firefighters drill at Station 9 in Mill Valley on Thursday. The annual budgets for two departments add up to nearly \$23 million. (Robert Tong/Marin Independent Journal)

By [Adrian Rodriguez](#), Marin Independent Journal

Posted: **09/16/17**, 6:02 PM PDT | Updated: 51 secs ago

Mill Valley and Southern Marin fire officials want to operate under a single fire chief after each department studied the potential benefits of sharing services.

“We’re trying to be as efficient as possible,” said Mill Valley fire Chief Tom Welch. “The battalion chief sharing has been really successful, so now we’re looking at additional opportunities in fire prevention and chief sharing.”

The Mill Valley Fire Department and the Southern Marin Fire Protection District are among several Marin fire agencies making moves to improve service while seeking some possible cost savings. Other fire districts are also exploring options for shared services, many pointing to the example set by Larkspur and Corte Madera and the successful formation of what will become the Central Marin Fire Department.

The proposal is to form a committee that would produce a cost-benefit analysis of sharing a fire chief, a deputy fire chief and a fire marshal in addition to the other positions and services shared already.

Welch and Southern Marin fire chief Chris Tubbs said that sharing a management staff would reduce redundancies and help with workflow and communication among the ranks. With two Mill Valley battalion chiefs soon retiring, the chiefs hope to also expand their candidate pool so that they could have a succession plan in place.

During a presentation on Sept. 5, Mill Valley council members said the moves raise questions of which district is responsible for what costs. Tubbs replied: “We don’t have the answers to those questions yet, which is why ... maybe this is a good opportunity for both of the governing bodies to get together and begin to decide what areas we want to further explore.”

The Mill Valley department operates with 24 firefighters on a \$5.5 million budget. The Southern Marin district has 50 firefighters and a \$17.1 million budget. Sharing battalion chiefs has saved more than \$500,000 annually in operating costs.

The two departments are not discussing a full merger just yet, although Tubbs and Welch said that could be in the cards far down the line. If they do end up sharing a management team, one of them would likely move into the deputy chief position, as neither one is planning to retire soon, they said.

The latest example of a merger between fire departments is in Central Marin.

Scott Shurtz, fire chief of the Larkspur and Corte Madera fire departments, said the consolidated Central Marin Fire Department will have 35 firefighters and a \$8.5 million annual budget, with financial support from each municipality.

Shurtz said Central Marin benefited from seasoned staff and elected officials who were eager to collaborate. He encourages other departments to consider shared services when it provides benefits to both sides.

“In the end, some partnerships just make more sense than others,” he said. “One size does not fit all.”

There are several shared emergency services in place across the county, including the Central Marin Training Consortium, the Southern Marin Emergency Medical Paramedic System, the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority, the Marin County Hazardous Materials Response Waste Team and several other joint powers agreements between districts and departments.

In Novato, the fire district, which has 69 firefighters and a \$31.2 million budget, works with the county fire department for fire marshal and investigative services, among other shared services.

The Marinwood Community Services District has begun discussing the future of its fire department, now that fire Chief Tom Roach announced he will retire at the end of the fiscal year. He has spent 26 years with the department and 14 years as chief.

There are 10 firefighters in the department, which has a \$2.8 million annual budget.

On Tuesday, the Marinwood district board approved forming a nine-person committee to explore “all options”, said Eric Dreikosen, district manager.

“This is not entirely spurred by the fact that the chief is retiring,” he said. “It’s time to just review our fire protection services and what makes most sense operationally and financially.”

There had been talks in the past to expand shared services between Marinwood and the San Rafael Fire Department, said San Rafael fire chief Chris Gray, who said the relationship between the departments remains strong.

“We will continue being interested in working with our neighboring fire departments, as we have demonstrated over the past years,” Gray said. “Fire service is one of the most transportable services.”

The San Rafael department has 72 firefighters and an annual budget of \$25 million.

The Ross Valley Fire Department is also seeking a new chief while exploring options for shared services. The department has 30 firefighters and \$9.8 million budget.

Retired chief Roger Meagor, who left the department in 2014, returned in August to serve as acting chief to fill a void left by Mark Mills. Mills was injured last year and has been approved to receive an industrial disability retirement plan, said department spokeswoman JoAnne Lewis.

Kentfield fire Chief Mark Pomi manages 10 firefighters and a \$5.7 million budget. He said the Kentfield Fire Protection District is always willing to help its neighbors, but possible consolidations are not always a good fit.

“Sometimes you get more out of sharing services,” Pomi said. He said a merger requires review of multiple governing bodies, including the Local Agency Formation Commission.

This was made evident in the ongoing formation process of the Central Marin department. The merger is being reviewed by LAFCO and the California Public Employees’ Retirement System, which has slowed the process.

The Marin County Fire Department has 90 firefighters, 70 seasonal firefighters and a \$26.4 million budget, and consistently works with other departments throughout the county.

When it comes to mergers, said Marin County fire Chief Jason Weber, “you don’t want to create a winner and a loser situation; it has to be a mutual benefit.”

“The truth is we all work together, and all the chiefs in Marin all get along and are supportive of each other,” he said.

Schroder: Alhambra Valley Annexation

September 18, 2017 | [0 Comments](#)

By ROB SCHRODER

Mayor of Martinez



During the Sept 6 meeting of the Martinez City Council considered, and approved, a waiver of city fees to process an annexation application for a single parcel in the Alhambra Valley. Annexations in every county is governed by Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCO) which review applications and either approve or disapprove annexation requests. LAFCO law is very confusing so the history of annexations in the Alhambra Valley is important to note.

In 2010 the City of Martinez annexed the Stonehurst and Alhambra Valley Ranch neighborhoods after consideration of all parcels in the city's Sphere of Influence (SOI) in the Alhambra Valley. After several public meetings it became apparent that the city would not be successful in any LAFCO protest hearings that included the entire valley. It was decided to annex the contiguous parcels with Deferred Annexation Agreement that were required by LAFCO in order to obtain water service from the city. We also included other contiguous parcels of willing property owners. None of the property owners that were annexed into the city in 2010 paid any City or LAFCO fees. All were paid by the City of Martinez.

The Dunivan property was originally included in the 2010 annexation application, but was removed as it is bifurcated by the Urban Limit Line (ULL). Under Measure J (1/2 cent sales tax used for transportation projects and roads and administered by CCTA) any city that annexes property outside of the ULL will lose their share of the Measure J funds, which for Martinez is millions of dollars over several years. It was not the property owner's choice to remove their property from the 2010 annexation application, it was removed by city staff to protect Martinez's share of transportation funds.

Every 5 years every community in the county has the opportunity to make minor adjustments (30 acres or less) to the Urban Limit Line (ULL). Now that the city can make minor adjustments to the ULL of 30 acres or under, we can move the ULL to include the entire 10 acre Dunivan parcel and eliminate what the LAFCO Executive Officer calls an "illogical boundary and service challenge." It also eliminates a "cherry stem" and creates a logical boundary that eliminates confusion on what agency is providing municipal services.

Although the annexation of multiple parcels at the same time is preferred, it is my position that the city continue to waive all city fees on individual parcels if the property meets three criteria:

- 1) The parcel is contiguous to other parcels in the city limits
- 2) The parcel is developed
- 3) The parcel has existing Martinez city water service

If a parcel, or parcels, are undeveloped and does not have Martinez city water service I do not support waiving city fees to annex the property.

The goal of the city has always been to eventually annex all parcels in our SOI, including the balance of the Alhambra Valley, Mt. View, Vine Hill, and North Pacheco. In fact, over time we have passed resolutions stating our intent to annex the remainder of the valley. This intent was critical to convincing LAFCO to approve Out of Area Service Agreements, thus allowing the city to provide water service to new developments such as the Alhambra Valley including the new subdivision at the "T" of Alhambra Valley Road and Reliez Valley Road. Unfortunately, we are not able to annex the new subdivision at this time as the parcels are not contiguous to other parcels that are in the city limits, but we are working to resolve this issue in the future, and this new procedure will assist in moving that plan forward.

Keep in mind that over time, waiving the City's annexation application processing fees will eventually be offset by the collection of property tax generated from these annexed parcels, while also helping these new residents acquire essential Municipal Services such as public safety and public work to these areas. It will also give residents a voice in the operation and planning the future of Martinez.

As we move forward with the annexation process in the Alhambra Valley, a great deal of communication and education will be needed. It is important that property owners who fit the recommended criteria are given an incentive to annex into the City of Martinez, thus becoming a win-win situation for both sides

Rob Schroder is the mayor of Martinez. Email him at rschroder@cityofmartinez.org.

The Sacramento Bee

Farming district says it won't pay for Delta tunnels in a vote that could kill the project

By Dale Kasler and Ryan Sabalow

September 19, 2017 3:17 PM

Fresno

An influential group of San Joaquin Valley farmers Tuesday voted against helping to pay for the Delta tunnels, denying Gov. Jerry Brown crucial financial support for the \$17.1 billion project.

Citing concerns about costs to individual farmers, Westlands Water District's board of directors voted 7-1 against participating in the project, known officially as California WaterFix.

Westlands is the first major water agency to vote on the project, and other big districts are expected to make their decisions in the coming weeks. Because the sprawling agricultural district in Fresno and Kings counties would have shouldered about a quarter of the project's costs, the vote could represent a fatal blow.

"I am not certain the project can go forward," said Westlands General Manager Tom Birmingham shortly after the vote. Earlier, he cast the decision in starker terms, saying if Westlands voted against the project, the tunnels "will die, the project will be over."

Brown's office insisted Tuesday that the vote would not doom the tunnels, one of the governor's major initiatives.

"There is one thing on which everyone agrees: Our aging water infrastructure needs to be modernized," John Laird, Brown's Natural Resources Agency secretary, said in a prepared statement. "Failing to act puts future water supply reliability at risk. This vote, while disappointing, in no way signals the end of WaterFix."

A spokeswoman for Brown, who was in Connecticut on Tuesday, referred to Laird's statement.

The "no" vote from a key potential backer of the largest water infrastructure project planned in California in decades reverberated through the state's water-policy world on Tuesday.

"Absent Westlands, you don't have a (tunnels) project," said Jeff Kightlinger, general manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

Metropolitan, serving 19 million Southern Californians, had been the tunnels project's primary cheerleader outside of Brown's office. Metropolitan is expected to vote on the project next month.

"This was designed to be a comprehensive solution for California – both ag and urban, and really cover all the major parties," Kightlinger said. "We would have designed a different project if it was just for the urban sector or something like that. But we didn't. My board has been pretty clear ... they're not in the business of subsidizing agriculture."

With its millions of ratepayers, Metropolitan has a far easier case to make to its member agencies to persuade them to pay for the tunnels. Metropolitan estimates the average monthly bills for its customers likely would increase by just \$1.90 to \$3.10 a month.

It's a tougher sell for farmers.

Westlands directors said they were uncomfortable with the costs that would be borne by the 600 farming families in the sprawling district. Westlands predicted the cost for its water would climb from \$160 per acre-foot to more than \$600.

"We just can't afford it," said board member Jim Anderson.

Directors also were leery about spending a lot of money on a project that, while intended to improve water deliveries, included no guarantee that the supply of water would grow. "There's just too many unknowns," said director Larry Enos. "The only guarantee is that once we do it, we have to pay the bonds back."

Not a single Westlands director was ready to vote in favor of the proposal. Westlands Chairman Don Peracchi, the only dissenting vote, said he wanted to give the Bureau of Reclamation a chance to reconsider its funding plan for the project.

Tunnels foes rejoiced at news of the Westlands vote.

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, of the group Restore the Delta, called it "a good day for California," but she said she isn't ready to declare victory in the fight against the project, which is vociferously opposed by many residents of the Delta.

"It isn't over till Gov. Brown declares it's over," she said.

Westlands directors acknowledged that something needs to be done to fix the Delta, whose fish populations have plummeted in part because of decades of water pumping by the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project. Board members said they want state and federal officials to come up with a new solution that would be more affordable.

The tunnels, by rerouting how water moves through the Delta, are intended to help protect fish while enabling the project pumps to operate more reliably. The pumps deliver millions of acre-feet of water each year to the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California.

Birmingham warned it's doubtful that a cheaper solution is in the offing. The longer California waits to fix the Delta, the more expensive it will get, he argued.

"Just the passage of time in this planning process (for the tunnels) has cost billions of dollars," he said.

The directors also said they were particularly leery of how the federal government structured the plan. The Bureau of Reclamation had exempted certain federal water districts from having to pay for the tunnels.

Reclamation, citing complicated arrangements in how the CVP functions, has said it believes those districts don't have to participate.

That decision shifted more of the burden to Westlands and its growers.

Some Westlands directors said they might be willing to delay a vote if they thought the Bureau of Reclamation would revisit the funding issue. Birmingham said he considered that unlikely.

The state and federal water projects pump enough of Northern California's river water through the Delta to fuel the multimillion-dollar agricultural bounty of the San Joaquin Valley. The Delta also provides much of the drinking water to more than 25 million people in Southern California and the Silicon Valley.

But decades of pumping have contributed to a disastrous decline of fish in the Delta, with species such as the Delta smelt teetering on the brink of extinction.

The pumps are so powerful that they can cause portions of the San Joaquin River to flow in reverse at critical points, pulling fish toward the pumps and predators. Because of the Endangered Species Act, the pumps often have to be turned off or throttled back, allowing water to spill out into the ocean instead of being delivered to the south-of-Delta customers.

Brown's administration said the tunnels would fix that. By diverting a portion of the Sacramento River at Courtland, well upstream of the pumping stations, the 40-mile-long twin tunnels would dramatically alter water flows through the estuary and largely correct the reverse-flow phenomenon. That would allow pumping to proceed more reliably, increasing deliveries to Westlands and other contractors, the administration said.

Nearly \$250 million has been spent planning the project over the past decade, with most of the funding coming from south-of-Delta agencies like Metropolitan. The Southern California water wholesaler also bought tracts of land in the Delta along the proposed tunnels route.

Tunnels proponents achieved crucial victories earlier this summer, when two federal agencies that oversee the fish populations signed off on the project. Brown's regulators also ruled that the tunnels would comply with the state's strict environmental laws.

But the project has been highly controversial.

Environmentalists argued that the project would harm fish, not help them. Delta farmers and other residents called the project a “water grab” that would devastate the Delta economy. “Stop the Tunnels” signs dot Delta roads and are displayed in many store-front windows.

Sacramento County, one of several area governments suing to block the project, argued in court papers that the project would bring ruin to small Delta towns at the south end of the county.

The project was dealt another blow earlier this month when a federal audit revealed that it had received an [improper \\$50 million subsidy](#) from the Bureau of Reclamation. The U.S. Department of the Interior’s inspector general said the money was spent helping Central Valley Project contractors, such as Westlands, plan the tunnels project. Brown’s office had insisted that no taxpayer funds would go to the tunnels.

“After duping their own investors and hiding \$50 million in what can only be seen as an illegal subsidy from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Westlands saw the writing on the wall that they can’t afford this project,” state Assemblyman Jim Frazier, D-Discovery Bay, said in a prepared statement. “This is a tiny victory as we continue to demand greater transparency to the true costs of this boondoggle.”

Rep. John Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove, said he knows Delta residents were cheering Tuesday, but they shouldn’t assume the project won’t be resurrected.

“There’s a considerable relief, but we also know it’s not the end of the issue,” Garamendi said. “We know the Delta remains at risk.”

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Published September 20th, 2017

Spirited assistant chief takes over ConFire operations division

By Nick Marnell



New Assistant Chief Ed Gonzales addresses the ConFire board Sept. 12. Photo Nick Marnell

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District promoted Battalion Chief Ed Gonzales to assistant chief of emergency operations in a restructuring of the district divisions in August. Gonzales replaces Assistant Chief Lon Goetsch, who takes over the district training division.

Gonzales climbed the rungs from firefighter to engineer to captain to lead the district's busiest battalion, No. 8, since 2014. It makes one wonder how the energetic assistant chief will adjust to the office in Pleasant Hill, away from the action in east Contra Costa County.

"On a day like today, I ask myself that," said Gonzales, waiting over an hour in the lobby for a preceding meeting to end.

Gonzales said that the staffing for Fire Station 16 in Lafayette is a priority, and that the problem with the sewer line at the station site has been resolved with the Contra Costa Central Sanitary District. The fire district expects to reopen the station in November 2018.

ConFire will find out this fall if it receives a federal grant for the hiring of another company at Fire Station 1 in Walnut Creek. "If we qualify, that will help our response into Lafayette," Gonzales said.

The new assistant chief said a huge priority will be to develop the ConFire personnel. "The average age is lower than in any time in my career," said Gonzales, a 28-year district veteran. "There is not a lot of experience among the personnel, and call volumes are going up every year. We have firefighters on the staff who were not even born when I started."

The newest firefighters will not be assigned to the district station with the lowest call volume, Lafayette Fire Station 17, Gonzales said. ConFire does not like to put new firefighters there, as they need to gain experience at a busier station.

Gonzales said that those who choose to work at Station 17 - and not many bid for the assignment - include firefighters who are recovering from injuries, those who have worked at a busy station and may need a down year, and those who are studying for a test. It's the same job, with the same demands, just fewer of them.

Not only will Gonzales spearhead the development of new firefighters, he will also mentor new battalion chiefs. Of 10 battalion chiefs, six will soon be retiring, he said.

Gonzales scored No. 1 on the promotional lists for both his 2003 appointment to captain and his 2014 battalion chief appointment. "I've got a chance to impart my years of operational experience to a new group who can benefit," Gonzales said.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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Published September 20th, 2017

Higher costs and protracted completion date for MOFD Station 43

By Nick Marnell

After the absence of construction activity over the lost summer of 2017, the projected costs to rebuild Moraga-Orinda Fire District Station 43 jumped more than \$1 million and completion of the station has been delayed until late 2018.

At a Sept. 6 special meeting, the district terminated its agreement with Pacific Mountain Contractors, the company originally chosen to rebuild Fire Station 43, and awarded a new construction contract to Federal Solutions Group, a San Ramon-based minority-owned federal contractor.

Pacific pulled out of its agreement with MOFD over what it cited were significant errors in the plans and specifications for the rebuilt fire station. Rather than litigate, the district attempted to renegotiate, but MOFD determined that Pacific was unwilling to build the station at any price, demanding release from the contract in June.

According to the separation agreement, Pacific paid MOFD \$54,000 to walk away and agreed to assign \$110,000 of preparatory work owed to its subcontractors. The district absorbed the subcontractor charges and built them into the terms of its \$3.34 million contract with Federal.

Adding costs incurred by Pacific, legal charges and the projected increases for labor and materials, the estimate for the rebuilt fire station rose from \$4 million to \$5.4 million, though the district has not approved \$500,000 of the recommended architectural, construction manager and contingency costs.

Things could have been worse.

The district was able to quickly secure the agreement with Federal, one of the original bidders on the station project, which resubmitted the lowest revised pricing to complete the fire station. That saved MOFD from another round of competitive bidding to select a contractor, likely pushing the project completion into mid-2019.

"It's a very unfortunate situation," said Kathleen Famulener, MOFD board president. "The original contractor underbid the project, and we couldn't continue. We are lucky to have worked out a deal and the new contractor is ready to go to work within weeks."

Louis Parsons, who signed the Pacific termination agreement, did not return calls seeking further explanation for the company's action.

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Published September 20th, 2017

Healy reflects on his years with MOFD

By Nick Marnell



MOFD Fire Chief Stephen Healy: More mountains to climb Photo Andy Scheck

Stephen Healy spent barely any time talking about what he accomplished as fire chief of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

Rather, a relaxed Healy, who leaves the district Sept. 20, talked over coffee and toast almost exclusively about those he worked with in his 12 years with MOFD.

"I'll most miss the people," the chief said. "Since 2006, I have been involved with the hiring or promotion of just about everyone in the district."

His interactions with people gave Healy his highest highs, but also provided his top challenge once he moved into the fire chief seat. "Deciding who to hire," Healy said. "The final say on hiring a firefighter was the biggest difference I felt as chief. You have the responsibility to hire the best people, and for some, it was tough telling them this was not a career for them."

From day one, the chief set out to establish trust in communication. If Healy had the chance to improve one aspect of his job, it would have been figuring out a way to better communicate. "We've always struggled with this. Do I send emails? Do I do station visits? Should I go through the battalion chiefs? Hold more captain meetings? The firefighters still bring it up - communication (stinks)."

The human resources and the legal aspects of the fire chief job Healy struggled with the most. "It's unpleasant, and it's all gray. That's where you sink or swim - how you handle personnel issues. The public knows nothing about those issues. The firefighters know nothing. The board knows nothing. I will not miss that."

When Healy took over as fire chief in 2013, he jumped right into the firefighter contract negotiations. The chief bore the brunt of the rhetoric and emotion along the way, as he tried to remain sensitive to both the board and the union.

His peers helped him through that tough time, and Paige Meyer, fire chief of the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, sat at the top of the help list. "During negotiations, I would call Paige, worried that the whole thing would blow. I'd call him at the end of the day, 'Dude, I'm worried, I'm nervous.' Paige was empathetic. 'I've been there. I've done it. You'll be OK. You're doing the right thing.' He was always there when I needed him."

As for the negotiated contract, "I felt good about everything except the pay cuts. The emotional impact had a big effect on a lot of people."

Operationally, Healy said he was happy with the district's lowered score assigned by the Insurance Services Office, which improved the district rating from a 3 to a 2, helping lower fire insurance premiums for some residents. And the chief repeated with pride that not one home in the district has been destroyed by a vegetation fire since 1988.

The rift between the two municipalities of the eponymous district over a perceived inequitable tax allocation barely registered on Healy's radar. "It's exaggerated. A small group of people are trying to make something more than what it is. I respect their passion, but I do not agree with their philosophy. MOFD is more than just Moraga and Orinda. We cover the reservoirs, Tilden Park, Canyon, what is it, 38 different tax zones?"

The chief may have downplayed his efforts, but others recognized his legacy. "It was great working with Chief Healy," said Local 1230 President Vince Wells. "He understood the importance of a good labor-management relationship."

"Chief Healy came in at a very difficult time and did a tremendous job getting everyone together to save the district," said Kathleen Famulener, MOFD board president. "The lights in the district remained on because of him."

Healy will continue to announce the football and lacrosse games at Monte Vista High School, where his son plays both sports. As a highpointer, the chief has scaled the highest peaks in all of the western states except for those in Wyoming, Montana and Colorado, and he intends to complete the list. "And I want to see a Steelers football game in Pittsburgh, a Denver Broncos game and a hockey game in Montreal."

But he likely will not have a lot of free time. "You can let everyone know that I am definitely looking for a job," the chief said, as his phone buzzed with another inquiry from a recruiter.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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Bay Area News Group

East Bay water board backs Delta tunnels project



This file shows some of the Sacramento San Joaquin River Delta, where the state wants to build two giant tunnels to move water to export pumps near Tracy. The Alameda County Zone 7 Water Agency board has endorsed the tunnel project on a 5-2 vote. (Bob Pepping/Bay Area News Group Archives)

By [Denis Cuff](mailto:dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com) | dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

PUBLISHED: **September 21, 2017** at 4:03 pm | UPDATED: September 22, 2017 at 9:53 am

LIVERMORE — One day after the largest water district in America pulled out of a \$17 billion state project to build twin tunnels under the Delta, a water supplier for 220,000 Alameda County residents supported the plan and said it wants to join in.

In a 5-2 decision Wednesday night, Alameda County's Zone 7 Water Agency endorsed the California WaterFix, which proposes to build tunnels under the Delta as a means of making state water supplies more reliable for buyers like Zone 7.

The agency also agreed to commit up to \$250,000 more toward state planning of the project.

Zone 7 managers recommended backing the project as a way to increase the reliability of state supplies that Zone 7 relies on for 80 percent of its water on average. The agency supplies wholesale water to Pleasanton, Livermore and Dublin water agencies that sell it to local residents.

"We need more water," said Jill Duerig, the agency's general manager.

On Tuesday, the Westland Water District Board's voted to pull out of the Delta project, likely making it more expensive for remaining partners like Zone 7.

Still, Duerig said Thursday that state officials have assured her the project can go ahead.

Joining the project would increase consumer water prices in the Tri-Valley about 20 percent over the next 10 to 15 years, according to a Zone 7 report.

“While the cost is significant,” the report concluded, “it’s half the cost of pursuing other water supply options based on multiple staff reports and evaluations.”

The two board members who voted against backing the tunnels project were Angela Ramirez Holmes and Jim McGrail.

California Resources Secretary John Laird said Thursday that in voting to support the project, the Zone 7 Board members “demonstrated their commitment to securing a clean and sustainable water supply for their community.”

Laird said the project is “the best solution to a problem that affects 25 million Californians, 3 million acres of farmland and the state’s economy.”

East Bay Times

Guest Commentary: ECCFPD must lobby Sacramento for equal protection

By [Bryan Scott](#) |

PUBLISHED: September 24, 2017 at 9:06 am | UPDATED: September 26, 2017 at 10:46 am

For years now the local fire district has pleaded poverty as the reason it cannot provide the adequate and necessary fire and emergency medical services that the East County community deserves. Stations have been closed, firefighters have been laid off, all because of lack of funds, the community has been told.

It is time for the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District to ask our state legislators for help. It is imperative that it take action to secure the additional funds to adequately operate the fire district.

The most likely source of these funds is the state's property tax revenues, which in California, are the traditional source of funding for fire districts. The historically low allocation rate in East County, set decades ago, needs to be changed, and state lawmakers must do the changing.

Other fire districts in the county are funded at a rate that is two, three, and as much as five times greater than ECCFPD, according to a county Local Agency Formation Commission report.

While East County is funded at just \$94 per person, residents in central parts of the county have the same services funded at rates of \$370 and \$449 per person, according to a June, 2016, LAFCO report. Residents of the Kensington community have their fire services funded at the rate of \$593 per person.

East County residents deserve equal protection of their lives and property. East County residents deserve a fairer allocation of the county's property tax funds.

State law prohibits any government agency from advocating for a ballot measure that comes before the voters. But there is no law that prevents a government agency from appealing to state lawmakers to change the property tax allocation rate.

The ECCFPD must demand, continually and persuasively, that state lawmakers change the four-decades old property tax allocation rate to an allocation rate that more appropriately reflects the needs of the community.

The ECCFPD Board should create a "Committee for Legislative Outreach," to work alongside today's Finance Committee and the Outreach-Public Education Committee. This Committee

should engage the public and undertake to help any and all state legislation that would improve funding for the fire district.

The ECCFPD can, and should, spend the money necessary to accomplish this. The recently discovered \$6.2 million, unbudgeted for any other need, is an ideal source of funds for this purpose.

Today our fire district is trying to operate with funding levels that may have been sufficient decades ago, when the area was sparsely populated and rural. There is no way those ancient funding levels can provide adequate protection for today's 115,000 residents spread over 249-square miles.

And East County's population of residents and businesses is still growing. Today's needs are so much greater, yet stations have closed until we have but three stations left.

This is wrong!

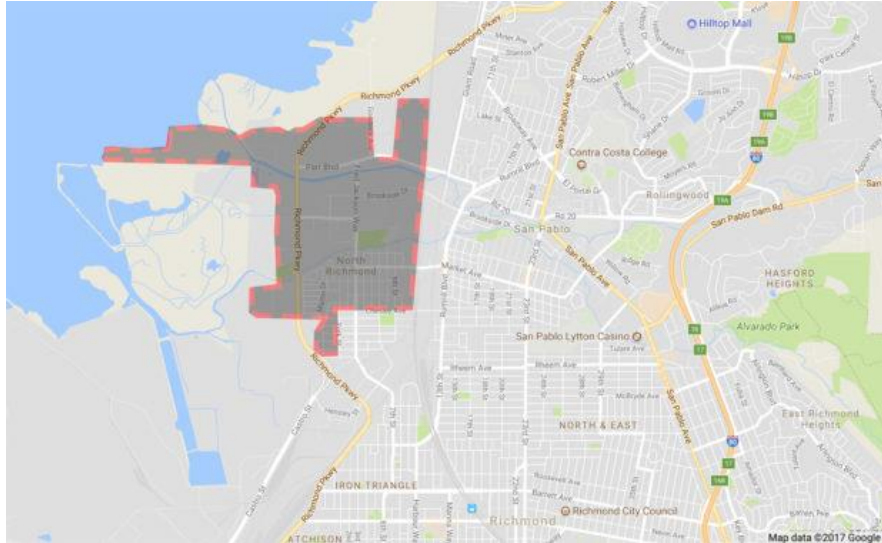
It is unfair that these essential government services are funded to such a greater extent in other parts of Contra Costa County when all residents of the county pay property taxes, under the same state taxation scheme. When the taxation programs are the same, the level of vital benefits provided to the residents ought to be the same, too.

Adequate funding for fire and emergency services must be provided immediately, before more people die, and more homes burn down.

Brentwood resident Bryan Scott is Co-Chair of East County Voters for Equal Protection, a non-partisan citizens action committee striving to improve funding for the ECCFPD. He can be reached at scott.bryan@comcast.net, or 925-418-4428. The group's Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/EastCountyVoters/>.

Richmond Confidential

Should city incorporate North Richmond? Residents divided on eve of official decision.



The 3,700 residents of North Richmond (highlighted) could join the city of Richmond at large. Image generated by Google Maps.

By [Josh Slowiczek](#) Posted **September 24, 2017** 10:14 pm

Public opinion is divided. Officials are mostly tight-lipped. And after more than 50 years, Tuesday night could bring political isolation to a close for North Richmond: City council is scheduled to decide on whether to begin the process to incorporate the community into Richmond at-large.

Mayor Tom Butt said annexing North Richmond is not an easy decision. He is inclined to support doing so, and has advocated for incorporation since his election. He thinks Richmond could provide better services than the county, but says “that’s not a criticism of the county; it’s just the way things are set up.”

There are strong voices coming from both sides of the debate. Public safety, gentrification and higher taxes are just a few of the issues that associated with this decision. Yet after four community meetings this summer, there remains very little clarity how the vote will play out tomorrow night.

In fact, Butt was the only Richmond official to respond to requests to discuss the issue; other councilmembers, the Richmond Progressive Alliance and law-enforcement agencies did not respond.

Currently, North Richmond is an unincorporated, 1.5 square-mile area surrounded by the city of Richmond but governed by the Contra Costa board of supervisors. For the roughly 3,700 residents who live within this boundary, basic services such as policing, public works and planning are provided by the county.

If North Richmond were to be annexed, fulfilling those services and more would become the city's responsibility. A draft of the financial impact report, released in July, indicated that annexation would cost the city between \$2 and \$2.3 million annually, after factoring in the revenue that it would receive from a slight increase in taxes and fees.

The bump in sales tax, and utility and business-license fees has become a point of contention for some, but others say it is a step in the right direction.

Some say outreach about the nuts and bolts of annexation improved during this latest attempt at incorporation. "For probably the first time in history, we are much more informed about what it will cost and what the challenges may be," said LaSaunda Tate, vice chairperson of the North Richmond Municipal Advisory Committee (NRMAC). "We are much more informed about what it will take."

Tate, a North Richmond resident and homeowner since 2013, said the area's unincorporated status has had negative impacts on both public safety and also health, which are compounded by a lack of political representation at the local level.

"When you are isolated from the larger community—when you don't have political representation and the same municipalities as your bordering city—it's easy for things to fall through the cracks," Tate said.

A memo released in July by county Supervisor John Gioia's office echoed Tate's stance. It suggested that annexation has the potential to improve public safety through the "elimination of a longstanding political line that divides police jurisdictions."

The Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office provides most services for the area, but splits a single police beat between North Richmond and East Richmond Heights, roughly four miles away. This poses a logistical challenge, according to Gioia.

The role of the sheriff's office in North Richmond came under fire in 2014 when The Mercury News reported that, over the course of four years, charges were only filed in five of the 19 killings that occurred in the area. Department policy, cut backs and geographic separation were cited as driving reasons for the lack of follow-up.

If North Richmond were to be annexed, the Richmond Police Department (RPD) would take over jurisdiction, which would require the presence of additional patrol officers and a new captain. The sheriff's office declined to discuss the possible annexation, and RPD's public information officer was unavailable.

“I do believe there are some advantages to their [North Richmond’s] annexation into Richmond, but I also respect that there is a higher tax burden,” Gioia said. “Ultimately, the residents must weigh in about whether that extra tax is worth it.”

For some, it’s not.

Henry Clark, longtime NRMAC member, said he knows many residents against annexation. He cited the increased taxes as a reason.

If annexed, residents would see the sales tax raised by 1 percent, and utility users would see a fee increase between 5 and 10 percent.

There would also be additional fee increases for business licenses and property taxes.

However, the renters of North Richmond—approximately 73 percent of residents—would benefit from the city’s Rent Control Ordinance, which includes eviction protections and an annual 3 percent cap on rent increases.

Clark is not sold on annexation, though. He said Richmond has never shown any interest in providing services to North Richmond, and he argued there is no need for an additional police presence with the joint efforts of the sheriff’s office, RPD and the California Highway Patrol.

“This idea of providing services is just a flat out lie,” Clark said. “It’s gentrification and a land grab. Bottom line, that’s what it comes down to.”

Fellow NRMAC member Tate said she thinks Clark raises valid concerns, but argued the realities of the Bay Area prove that gentrification will occur whether or not North Richmond is annexed.

“I think that these are two isolated issues,” she said. “Helping to improve the livelihoods of those that live here by having annexation does not create gentrification.”

This difference in perspectives among NRMAC members was reflected during a committee vote earlier this month: Three members were against annexation, two abstained, and one, Aaron Morgan, voted in favor. With four votes needed to pass a motion, no recommendation was provided.

Now, the decision rests with Richmond City Council. If officials decide to continue the process, annexation will be initiated with the Local Agency Formation Commission, which can approve, edit or deny.

Approval will result in a hearing, where residents can share their views, and if more than 50 percent of commenters protest, the annexation process will be terminated.

No one seems to know whether Tuesday’s city council decision will be the last word in a long history of attempts to incorporate. Tate urged everyone to study the issue.

“There is a reason why unincorporated areas in our country, that are in low-income communities, are not thriving,” she said.

Clarification: This story originally reported that LaSaunda Tate voted in favor of annexation. That is incorrect. The member who supported annexation was Aaron Morgan. Tate was absent from the vote, but submitted a letter supporting annexation, which was read into public record by the chairperson, Donald Gilmore.

Filed under: [Development](#), [Economy](#), [Featured](#), [Front](#), [Government](#), [North Richmond](#), [Uncategorized](#)

Tagged: [city council](#), [Development](#), [gentrification](#), [land grab](#), [North Richmond](#), [Richmond CA](#), [Richmond City Council](#), [unincorporated](#)

4 Comments

1.  *Gary Levy*

[September 25, 2017 at 7:00 am](#)

Richmond can not handle the duties that would be needed to be done. Just look at Richmond Annex. They do not do much for the Annex. No Police patrols, no street cleaning, no street maintenance, etc. In twenty-five years, maybe I have seen a Richmond police officer in the area 10 times..

[Reply](#)

2.  *Commenter*

[September 25, 2017 at 11:14 am](#)

Of course Mayor Butt is the only one ready to comment on this issue. He is the only person on the council with the depth of knowledge and experience to gauge what annexation will mean. Everyone else on the council are relatively recent residents of the area and/or new to city government.

The annexation of North Richmond is something that has been discussed for some 60 years now. In the 1960's it was considered that the citizens of North Richmond were for annexation so that they could benefit from services and especially police services to combat the high crime in the area. Those against annexation were the industrial and agriculture businesses and landowners who didn't want the additional taxes and regulations it would bring. A 1970 study from UC Berkeley noted that the criminal elements in North Richmond were also against annexation for the obvious reasons. It will be interesting to see how this turns out.

[Reply](#)

3.  [Ardy Leenders](#)

[September 26, 2017 at 3:58 pm](#)

Why is this a choice between annexation to the City of Richmond or the status quo with the County. Why don't we incorporate North Richmond as an independent city. The new city would get the county funds presently spent on police and fire services. The new city could get state and federal grants to expand services or levy the same or less taxes that the City of Richmond would be levying. The new city could have preferred hiring from the community.

The City of Richmond is only interested in expanding its' tax base in order to pay the outrageous retirement benefits of it's city workers.

[Reply](#)

4.  *Commenter*

[September 26, 2017 at 6:14 pm](#)

“The City of Richmond is only interested in expanding its' tax base in order to pay the outrageous retirement benefits of it's city workers.”

You did read where the fiscal study determined that Richmond would LOSE money by doing this, right?

I am no expert on this, but North Richmond is a very poor area. Becoming an independent bankrupt city wouldn't likely benefit them either. I would assume that someone would have suggested it after some 50-60 years now if it was a better option, but perhaps it is. Why don't you bring it up at the meeting tonight?

The Sacramento Bee

Delta tunnels dead? Southern California ready to plow ahead

By Dale Kasler
dkasler@sacbee.com

September 26, 2017 3:55 PM

Southern California's mammoth water agency appeared ready to plow ahead with the Delta tunnels project Tuesday, despite a ["no" vote by a giant bloc](#) of San Joaquin Valley farmers that could doom the \$17 billion proposal.

The Metropolitan Water District's board of directors signaled that it's ready to vote Oct. 10 on whether to pay for about one-fourth of the tunnels project, a \$4 billion commitment. Metropolitan's general manager, Jeff Kightlinger, urged directors to proceed with a vote as a way of determining whether the controversial project can be salvaged.

"We need to take our action because we need to understand who's in this project, and who's not," Kightlinger said during a board meeting at Metropolitan's Los Angeles headquarters.

Metropolitan's share of the tunnels would be larger than anyone's. "We're an anchor tenant," Kightlinger said. "No one's going to make a decision to be in or out of this project until they really know what Metropolitan is going to do."

Board member Larry McKenney agreed, saying a "yes" vote from Metropolitan could boost other potential partners' confidence in the tunnels. He told fellow directors to set aside the implications of last week's rejection by directors at Westlands Water District, an agricultural irrigation agency that was counted on to supply about \$3 billion worth of funding.

"I don't want to be influenced by them," said McKenney, who represents Orange County on the Metropolitan board. "We can lead the way."

Westlands voted against participating in the tunnels, known officially as California WaterFix, out of sheer sticker shock. U.S. water officials have settled on a cost-allocation plan that essentially excuses several major agricultural districts, ballooning the costs for other federal districts such as Westlands. South-of-Delta customers of the State Water Project, on the other hand, have been told they must participate financially or find another state contractor to take their share.

Because costs are being spread more widely, the project is more affordable for state contractors. If Westlands and other federal water customers won't jump in, Kightlinger and other proponents have begun floating the idea of a [scaled-down tunnels project](#) that would only serve State Water Project customers.

But opponents of the tunnels say Westlands' rejection effectively kills the plan altogether.

"All funding plans are out the window," said Brenna Norton of the environmental group Food & Water Watch, in comments to the Metropolitan board.

The tunnels are designed to enhance deliveries to south-of-Delta water agencies by rerouting how water flows through the troubled Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. By diverting a portion of the Sacramento River at a point near Courtland, and shipping it directly to the giant pumping stations 40 miles south via underground tunnels, the project would protect endangered fish species. That means pumping could proceed more reliably.

Opponents say California WaterFix would worsen the Delta's environmental problems and bring more harm to fish.

Dale Kasler: [916-321-1066](tel:916-321-1066), [@dakasler](https://twitter.com/dakasler)

East Bay Times

North Richmond leader's response to Richmond mayor's annexation effort: 'You have lost your mind, period'

Talk of annexation gets heated at Richmond City Council meeting; vote on issue postponed three weeks

By [Gary Peterson](#) | gpeterson@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
PUBLISHED: **September 27, 2017** at 10:45 am | UPDATED: September 27, 2017 at 11:47 am

Let's begin with a disclaimer. A lot of people have done a lot of work toward the proposed annexation of North Richmond by Richmond — a process only slightly less detailed and technical than the splitting of an atom.

Five community meetings were conducted over the summer. Tuesday night, the Richmond City Council received a comprehensive report that included fiscal analysis and a service plan study. Fine work. Good people. One problem:

While the What and How of the oft-contemplated annexation was explained in excruciating detail, the Why of the matter was never apparent.

I can see you tilting your head. Hang on — Dr. Henry Clark will be along shortly to enlighten and entertain you. But first, a spoiler: a vote on the proposal was postponed until Oct. 17 amid heated acrimony.

The conceptual rationality for an arranged marriage between Richmond and North Richmond (some might characterize it as a shotgun wedding) was expressed passionately by Richmond Mayor Tom Butt, who seemed to have the most emotional skin in the game. The genesis of North Richmond, Butt said Tuesday, was largely due to racism. During the 1940s, people of color were relegated to a 1.5-square-mile plot that was prone to flooding, downwind from the oil refinery and next door to the dump.

Annexing North Richmond and its 3,700 residents, Butt said, would be about “making it right.” But wait, there's more. An annexed North Richmond, Butt said, would receive better police services than the current tag-team coverage afforded the community by the Contra Costa Sheriff's Office and Richmond Police. It would give North Richmond a bigger say in local government; currently it is overseen by the county Board of Supervisors (though it has a municipal advisory committee). The cost of annexation to Richmond, according to an analysis awash in assumptions and scenarios, would be \$2 million to \$2.3 million annually.

Butt said a small marijuana grow in annexed North Richmond could offset that cost. “We have a 5 percent tax on that,” he said. “It’s possible one property could generate enough money to cover the deficit.” Butt also wondered out loud if the county could be persuaded to share the financial burden.

Then came the public commenters. There were only a few, but they were packing attitude.

“I, unlike some members of the council, haven’t made up my mind up yet because I don’t have enough facts,” said Richmond resident Don Gosney, whose comments hinted at the council’s dysfunctional history. “At least one of you has publicly stated you refuse to listen to anyone who disagrees with you, and one of you has not made her contact information public. How are you supposed to know the viewpoints of the public?”

Gosney then cut straight to the Why question.

“I know there have been numerous public meetings in North Richmond,” he said, “but I can’t see where a single meeting was held in Richmond to ask this all-important question: Do the people of Richmond want to make this happen? How exactly will we benefit from this?”

As good as Gosney was, Clark was the show stopper.

“No one was doing a diddly nothing for North Richmond until we organized the (municipal advisory committee),” Clark said. “The festivals and other improvements out there in North Richmond happened under our leadership. Now Tom Butt wants to come riding in on his white horse, talking some nonsense about growing marijuana in North Richmond? You have lost your mind, period.”

Yes, few speakers. But they had the audience voicing its support to the point that Butt threatened to have people removed from the council chamber. Ultimately, while Butt pushed for a vote Tuesday, he got no seconds on a motion and the vote was kicked down the road.

“People need to understand,” he said, “this is not the end of a process. It’s the beginning of a process.”

Wanna bet?

Richmond Standard

North Richmond residents can expect bills to rise with annexation

September 27, 2017

North Richmond residents can expect their bills to go up if the city of Richmond is successful in annexing the unincorporated area of Contra Costa County, according to a financial analysis presented to Richmond City Council on Tuesday.

For years, Richmond Mayor Tom Butt and other elected officials have proposed bringing North Richmond under the city's jurisdiction, saying in part that annexation would better address public safety by having the Richmond Police Department monitoring the area rather than the Contra Costa County Office of the Sheriff. Annexation, the mayor added, would correct an injustice that dates back before WWII, when Richmond neglected to incorporate North Richmond "because it was largely poor and black."

But the mayor has acknowledged that annexation is a complex process that is expected to be costly to the city, and to also increase costs for North Richmond's roughly 3,700 residents. On Tuesday, analysts with Willdan Financial Services presented its findings on those cost impacts to council.

Council did not vote Tuesday on whether to move forward with the annexation process, deciding to discuss the matter further at its Oct. 17 meeting.

The cost

The city of Richmond, which has struggled in recent years to balance budget deficits, would need to pay an extra \$2.2 million annually after incorporating North Richmond, as the cost to provide services to the community would surpass the revenue generated by North Richmond. That doesn't account for one-time and ongoing capital needs, analysts say.

North Richmond residents will also pay more. Richmond residents pay higher property taxes, so someone who owns a North Richmond home valued at \$100,000 would need to pay an extra \$140 annually in property taxes, according to the financial analysis.

Table 20: Changes in Costs to Residents

<u>Item</u>	<u>Increase / Fees</u>
<u>Utility User Tax</u>	
Telecommunications	9.5%
Prepaid Wireless	9.0%
Video (Cable TV) ¹	5.0%
Electricity	10.0%
Gas	10.0%
<u>Property Tax</u>	
Annual Property Tax Override	\$140 per \$100,000 assessed valuation
<u>Sales Tax</u>	
County	8.25%
Richmond	9.25%
<u>Rental Inspection Program</u>	
Registration/Processing Fee	\$ 79
Initial Inspection Fee (per unit)	157
Re-inspection Fee (per unit)	66
<u>Business License Tax</u>	
County - Base Fee	\$ 100.00
County - Per Employee	10.00
Richmond - Base Fee	\$ 234.10
Richmond - Per Employee (First 25 Employees)	46.80
Richmond - Per Employee (26+ Employees)	40.10

¹ This service is also charged a 5% franchise fee in Richmond.

Sources: City of Richmond; Willdan Financial Services.

North Richmond

residents don't currently pay utility user taxes, which they would be required to pay in Richmond. Also, Richmond's sales tax is 1 percent higher than the county's. And in Richmond, garbage collections for three months is \$10 higher than in North Richmond.

Additionally, business license fees are two times higher in Richmond (per employee it's about four times higher than county).

North Richmond would also support Richmond's rent control program at \$98 per unit. And there is also Richmond's rental inspection fee that the county doesn't require. Finally, there would be cost impacts for impact, building, development and traffic fees, which vary.

Community reaction

In public hearings about annexation, North Richmond residents have expressed concerns about the increased costs, including the impact on seniors and residents on fixed incomes, according to analysts. Others have expressed concern over the possibility for gentrification.

While some residents see patrols by the Richmond Police Department as beneficial, others said they were happy with the Contra Costa County Office of the Sheriff.

Some residents have also objected to Butt's belief that North Richmond land could be used for cannabis grow operations.

"If this were purely a business decision...I think we would have to say no, it's a bad deal," Butt said, citing the costs. "It's unclear that we can quantify any advantages to it."

However, Butt says there is an intangible benefit in that annexation would correct an injustice against North Richmond residents years ago, when the city didn't want the low-income area under its jurisdiction.

"Recognizing that isolating people in a small area because of their economic position and race is just not what we do in America," the mayor said.

The process

If council ultimately decides to move forward with annexation, the process will be lengthy and difficult.

Richmond would submit an application to the Local Agency Formation Commission (Lafco), which would review the application and set a hearing.

Lafco has the ability to either approve the city's application, modify it or deny it. If approved, possible objections by residents would lead to a protest hearing.

If less than 25-percent of registered voters or landowners disagree with annexation, Lafco would still confirm annexation. If between 25 percent and 50 percent of landowners or registered voters are opposed, then there will be an election. If over 50-percent of landowners and registered voters oppose, then annexation is terminated.

Union City Patch

Governor Signs Sen. Wieckowski's Bill To Streamline Government

The legislation makes it easier to eliminate districts that are no longer performing the services for which they were established.

By [News Desk \(Patch Staff\)](#) - Updated **Sep 28, 2017** 4:02 pm ET

From The State of California: Today Governor Jerry Brown signed SB 448, a bill by state Sen. Bob Wieckowski (D-Fremont) that will increase transparency on special districts and make it easier to eliminate districts that are no longer performing the services for which they were established.

Special districts often serve narrow and technical purposes, which helps to render them largely opaque and often unaccountable. SB 448 will improve oversight of California's special districts.

“While many of these districts perform important services for our communities, it turns out some of them are not so special,” said Wieckowski, a member of the Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee. “Twenty-nine districts have not reported revenues to the state Controller’s Office since 2003 yet they still exist. SB 448 creates a streamlined process for Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCOs) to dissolve districts whose audits show they are no longer performing.”

Apart from self-reported audits and a municipal review from a LAFCO every five years, there is little oversight of these districts. Their services vary from fire protection and highway lighting to pest abatement and water service. California has no single, comprehensive list of how many special districts exist.

SB 448 requires the state Controller’s Office to create a comprehensive list of special districts by July 1, 2019 and to update it annually. Inactive districts will be dissolved by their local LAFCO within 90 days of notification from the Controller’s Office.

The state’s Little Hoover Commission supports SB 448 and had urged the Governor to sign the bill.

“After a year-long study on special districts, the commission found numerous barriers that make it difficult for LAFCOs to initiate dissolutions or consolidations of special districts when deemed necessary and appropriate,” said Carole D’Elia, the commission’s executive director. “SB 448 gives LAFCOs the authority to efficiently eliminate inactive special districts and the commission is pleased that this important bill was signed today.

Currently, LAFCOs have the authority to dissolve special districts, but costly report requirements and small budgets prevent them from eliminating even districts that no longer perform.

SB 448 was supported by the California Association of Realtors, CALAFCO, health care districts, water agencies, and counties.

Senator Wieckowski's 10th District, includes southern Alameda County and parts of Santa Clara County.

Image Courtesy of State of California

The Sacramento Bee

In 1939, the feds made a Central Valley water deal. It may doom the Delta tunnels.

By Dale Kasler and Ryan Sabalow

dkasler@sacbee.com

October 02, 2017 4:00 AM

Dam builders from President Franklin Roosevelt's administration wanted to bring water to the parched eastern half of the San Joaquin Valley, but first they had to deal with a cluster of landowners whose ancestors had been there since the 1800s.

The deal they cut in 1939 paved the way for much of the Central Valley Project, an engineering marvel that helped turn the Valley into one of the world's most productive farming regions.

It has also formed the basis, nearly 80 years later, of a major funding impasse that threatens to unravel California WaterFix – Gov. Jerry Brown's plan to build a pair of tunnels beneath the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to modernize the aging water delivery system begun during Roosevelt's New Deal.

The issue came to a head when the board of Westlands Water District, the largest of all the water agencies served by the Central Valley Project, [voted Sept. 19 against paying](#) for its share of the expected \$17.1 billion cost of the tunnels.

The vote by Westlands, which represents hundreds of farmers in Fresno and Kings counties, left a multibillion-dollar hole in the construction budget for WaterFix, which is designed to improve water deliveries to farms and cities south of the Delta. WaterFix advocates have since floated the idea of a [scaled-back, less-expensive](#) version of the tunnels.

Westlands' decision was rooted in a cost-allocation formula imposed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation – a formula that has its origins in the 1939 deal and serves as a reminder of the convoluted nature of water distribution in California.

“This just comes with the territory to some degree,” said Jay Lund, director of UC Davis' Center for Watershed Sciences.

In a nutshell, Reclamation's formula effectively exempts a large group of water users who get their supplies from Friant Dam, the facility made possible by the Roosevelt-era agreement, from having to help pay for the Delta tunnels. This group includes the city of Fresno and a string of farm-irrigation districts stretching 150 miles south.

For Westlands and many other Central Valley Project customers, Reclamation's system inflates their costs for participating in WaterFix by several billion dollars. Westlands said farmers' water costs could quadruple, to more than \$600 an acre-foot, if the district jumped into the project.

"I don't know that we can afford those numbers," said Westlands director Todd Neves, a tomato and almond grower, as he prepared to cast his "no" vote. So far, not a single CVP contractor has committed to paying for WaterFix.

Reclamation operates its Central Valley Project alongside the State Water Project; both pump water out of the Delta to a variety of cities and farm districts in the San Joaquin Valley, Bay Area and Southern California. Brown's administration says the tunnels would improve the Delta's crumbling ecosystem while enabling the pumps to operate more reliably, increasing water deliveries to the two projects' customers.

The idea has been that south-of-Delta water districts would pay for the tunnels, in amounts that correspond to the volume of water they get. Brown's Department of Water Resources has said all State Water Project customers south of the Delta must pay, or find another state contractor to take their share.

For federal contractors, the Bureau of Reclamation has taken a different approach – to Westlands' frustration. Although Reclamation has [contributed millions to the planning](#) process, the bureau says that because WaterFix hasn't been authorized by Congress, it lacks legal standing to compel all of its south-of-Delta contractors to contribute. Participation is voluntary.

What's more, Reclamation signaled to a major group of customers – the districts getting water out of Friant Dam – that their supplies are probably secure enough that they don't need the tunnels.

With that assurance in mind, the Friant districts have said they're probably willing to contribute only a small sum to WaterFix's budget but not nearly a "full" share. Friant customers get at least 800,000 acre-feet of water a year from the Central Valley Project, enough to nearly fill Folsom Lake to capacity, making them one of the largest customers of the Central Valley Project.

The funding dilemma can be traced directly to the 1939 agreement.

Two years after Congress authorized construction of the Central Valley Project, officials at Reclamation faced a problem. They wanted to build a dam on the San Joaquin River at Friant, just outside of Fresno, to deliver water to the east side of the valley. But they couldn't build Friant without first making peace with a group of downstream landowners descended from legendary California cattleman and land baron Henry Miller. These landowners had been farming along the San Joaquin since the 1800s, had some of the most ironclad water rights in the state and weren't eager to let Reclamation dam their river.

"There's a property right in water. Those users have to be negotiated with," said Jennifer Harder, a water-law expert at the University of the Pacific's McGeorge School of Law.

A deal was signed July 27, 1939. Under the “Contract for the Exchange of Waters,” the landowners allowed the government to dam the river at Friant, creating the eastern branch of the Central Valley Project.

In return, the landowners, known as Exchange Contractors, were guaranteed 840,000 acre-feet of water a year, pumped out of the Delta from the Sacramento Valley. To this day, their water costs are shouldered by the Friant water districts.

The Exchange Contractors make no apologies for their special stature, noting that similar arrangements were made with senior water-rights holders in the Sacramento Valley to permit the construction of Shasta and Oroville dams.

“It’s just the reality of the way the system was set up,” said Cannon Michael, an Exchange Contractor in the Los Banos area and the great-great-great grandson of Henry Miller. “It was set up a long time ago and it’s the way California water law came into play...People accept the water rights system for what it is.”

The water rights system, though, has left the tunnels project with one less major group of customers to pay for it.

Not the Exchange Contractors – no one is arguing that these farmers, who’ve never had to pay for their Central Valley Project water, should now have to pitch in for the tunnels.

The Friant customers are another story.

For one thing, they’ve always paid their share of costs for the Central Valley Project, including the cost of water that’s shipped from the Delta to the Exchange Contractors.

For another, even though they don’t get water from the Delta – it all comes from the San Joaquin River, by way of Friant Dam – the Friant group depends on the Delta to operate smoothly. Why? Because if the Exchange Contractors don’t get their full allotment from the Delta, they have the right to pull water away from the Friant districts. It’s happened twice, during the drought years of 2014 and 2015.

Tom Birmingham, general manager at Westlands, said Friant’s unusual status in the Central Valley Project should compel the Friant districts to pay for a full share of the Delta tunnels.

“That’s consistent with Reclamation’s historic practice,” Birmingham said.

Friant water users see it differently. True, their supplies get jeopardized if the Exchange Contractors get shorted. But they’ve been told by Reclamation that the tunnels probably aren’t needed to make sure the Exchange Contractors get all they’ve been promised. So they’re looking at making a modest investment in the tunnels, as a kind of insurance policy to ensure that the Delta pumps can operate more reliably.

“We have an interest in making sure that things get better in the Delta,” said Jason Phillips, chief executive of the Friant Water Authority. Friant’s board of directors issued a statement Thursday saying “we are generally supportive” of WaterFix.

But Phillips said Friant’s member agencies aren’t willing to pay at anywhere near the level Westlands is suggesting.

“We’re probably in the single digits of the percentage of the project,” Phillips said.

For now, Friant officials aren’t in a rush to commit to WaterFix. In its statement of support for the tunnels, the Friant board said it’s premature to say how much it will invest.

“Until we have certain key questions answered and are able to obtain a fuller grasp of how are member agencies could potential benefit, (Friant) is unable to make any additional determinations at this time,” the board said.

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East Bay Times

Developer to update Concord Naval Weapons Station plans

By [Lisa P. White](#) | lwhite@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

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CONCORD — The city is holding two study sessions this month on the specific plan for the first phase of the Concord Naval Weapons Station redevelopment.

The Planning Commission meeting is 6:30 p.m. Oct. 4, at the Civic Center, 1950 Parkside Drive. The City Council is scheduled to hold a study session at 6:30 p.m. Oct. 11, also at the Civic Center.

The Concord Reuse Project Area Plan calls for building up to 12,200 housing units and 6.1 million square feet of commercial space on about 2,300 acres of the former military base. The East Bay Regional Park District will receive 2,600 acres for the future Concord Hills Regional Park. The Navy is scheduled to begin transferring land to the city in late 2018.

Developer Lennar-Five Point's plans for the first 500 acres of the former military base include 4,392 housing units, 1.7 million square feet of commercial space, two community centers, a new school and 79 acres of parks and open space.

Based on feedback from the community, Lennar has proposed several changes to phase one, including removing the commercial site between Willow Pass Road and Highway 4; adding 63 acres for housing; and reorienting the development near the North Concord BART station to create a Main Street and connect with the new development area.

With input from the city and an 11-member community advisory committee, Lennar is working on the project specific plan which defines land uses, describes the components of private and public transportation, creates development standards, addresses natural resources and water, sewage and solid waste disposal. Details about affordable housing also will be included.

OPEN FORUM On California Water

State must advance delta tunnel plan

By John Laird



Rich Pedroncelli / Associated Press 2016 The Bay Area relies on the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and its tributaries for about 70 percent of its water supply. If the status quo continues in the delta, 25 million people and 3 million acres of farmland are at risk of losing up to 20 percent of their future water supplies.

The Bay Area imports most of its water and relies on the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and its tributaries for about 70 percent of its supply. Those supplies face an uncertain future as a changing climate shrinks the Sierra snowpack and raises sea levels, and a declining ecosystem results in further restrictions — all while the Bay Area's population and economy continue to grow.

The stark reality is that 25 million people and 3 million acres of farmland are at risk of losing up to 20 percent of their future water supplies if the status quo continues in the delta.

And though voters backed a portfolio of water alternatives in the 2014 water bond — including more conservation, storage and water recycling — and California adopted a new process to get to sustainable groundwater management, these actions are not enough to stabilize the system, address ecosystem woes and meet future needs.

We must have action in the delta. California WaterFix, which would construct new intakes in the northern delta and move water through tunnels to reduce conflicts with endangered species habitats, is the state's science-driven proposal to upgrade our aging water system and protect water supply reliability. Engineers, scientists, water experts and business groups have voiced their support.

Without the WaterFix upgrade, it's clear that water supplies will steeply decline over time, with the loss of up to 1 million acre-feet a year or nearly 20 percent of what is delivered today.

WaterFix is not about extracting more water from the delta. It's about avoiding further declines in a supply that millions of Bay Area residents and others in the state have invested in for decades. We need increased investments in conservation, recycling and other supplies, but must also modernize our existing water delivery system. In fact, some strategies such as conservation and recycling can't work in the future without the reliable water WaterFix will provide.

A companion state initiative known as California EcoRestore will enhance 30,000 acres of habitat in the delta. Add to that the Brown administration's ongoing effort to secure voluntary, collaborative agreements to improve flows and habitat in the delta and the Sacramento and San Joaquin river watersheds, plus significant dollars in a bond measure headed for the 2018 ballot, and these actions together represent our best, most comprehensive approach to protecting the delta ecosystem.

After 10 years of review, tens of thousands of pages of environmental analyses, extensive modeling and public comment, it is now up to local public water agencies to define their level of participation in WaterFix over the coming weeks.

Though Westlands Water District has decided not to participate in WaterFix under current financing scenarios, Zone 7 Water Agency in eastern Alameda County has voted to come in. Others will as well. If necessary, the project could be scaled to the needs of agencies that decide to participate.

The state is not going to walk away from advancing a solution. We have an obligation to pursue this upgrade. To do nothing would be irresponsible. It's time to move forward with WaterFix.

John Laird is the California Natural Resources Secretary.

Published October 4th, 2017

Festive sendoff for MOFD Chief Healy

By Nick Marnell



Family, friends and coworkers of Fire Chief Stephen Healy celebrated his 31-year fire service career and his 12 years with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District during a farewell party at the Hacienda de Las Flores in Moraga Sept. 20.

County Supervisor Candace Andersen recognized Healy with a resolution from the Board of Supervisors, and officials from Moraga and Orinda read proclamations from their municipalities. Current and former members of the district board and friends from other fire agencies honored the outgoing chief, with the firefighters presenting him an axe, a tool put into service while Healy was fire chief and symbolizing the history and experience of all of the fire service members.

Paige Meyer, left, with MOFD Fire Chief Stephen Healy Photo Nick Marnell

The banter between Healy and Paige Meyer, fire chief of the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, stole the show. "Thanks for dressing up," Healy zinged at Meyer,

the only chief officer not in Class A dress blues. It was payback from a meeting years ago when Meyer looked in the audience for Healy and asked him to please stand. Except that Healy was standing.

Healy read a short, emotional speech, thanking his family, the firefighters, the district staff and board members. "This is the best place I have ever worked," Healy said. "Nowhere else has even come close."

The dozens in attendance applauded MOFD Director Steve Anderson's concluding words. "The true test of someone's character is if they do the right thing when no one is looking," Anderson said.

"The chief did the right thing when no one was looking."

Healy is succeeded by Interim Fire Chief Jerry Lee, who was sworn in earlier that evening at a district board meeting.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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Published October 4th, 2017

Public expects next MOFD chief to thoroughly grasp the numbers

By Nick Marnell

Above all else, the fire chief of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District must have a handle on finances, district residents told the board at a Sept. 27 community workshop designed to gather input on what qualities and experience the public wants in its new chief.

Financial problems have dominated district headlines for eight years, beginning with the fallout from an incorrect pension the board approved for a retiring fire chief that the district pension manager later reduced by \$1 million. The district misapplied \$2 million earmarked to pay down its pension obligation bond and its auditor incorrectly recorded a \$23 million prepaid item in its 2015 and 2016 financial reports. Since 2016 the board includes a majority of directors with private industry financial experience.

Dozens filled the Moraga Library conference room for the MOFD workshop, even with attendance likely suppressed by a high-profile Moraga Town Council meeting. Interim Fire Chief Jerry Lee and his board received plenty of advice from passionate district residents.

"We need somebody with the background to be able to manage the underfunded employee pension plan," said Orinda resident Kathy Finch, referring to the more than \$60 million in net pension and retiree health care liabilities carried by the district. Other Orinda residents talked about the tax allocation discrepancy between the two major district municipalities. "The new chief must take care of Orinda," said Janet Maiorana.

Former MOFD director and Moraga resident Dick Olsen said it was essential that any required financial sacrifices be equitably shared while maintaining services and fairly compensating employees. Olsen also recommended that the new chief live within 10 miles of the heart of the district in order to respond timely to emergencies.

"It is important that the chief you hire have the prospect of remaining for at least five years," said former director John Wyro, noting that without longevity it will be difficult for the chief to maintain credibility within the community. Superlative political skills to deal with the board and the district factions were a fire chief must, added Canyon resident Jonathan Goodwin.

With a reminder that the job is more than just financially driven, Vince Wells, president of Local 1230 of the firefighters union, advised the board to be sure to hire a chief with a thorough knowledge of fire operations. "We put our lives on the line for that person," Wells said.

Lee said he is considering applying for the permanent job but is weighing personal and family considerations. "I have not made my final decision," Lee said.

The district has retained Roseville-based Bob Murray and Associates to conduct the search for the new fire chief.

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Richmond Confidential

City council delays North Richmond annexation decision after divided views and questions about logistics, costs



Councilmember Jovanka Beckles asks a county official about the logistics of policing North Richmond during last week's meeting, which was supposed to see a vote on the annexation process. (Photo by Josh Slowiczek)

By [Josh Slowiczek](#) Posted **October 3, 2017** 3:13 pm

Last week, city council pushed back a decision to take the next step in annexing North Richmond after councilmembers expressed concern over logistics and public opinion. The vote will now occur on October 17, extending the already long and contentious debate.

According to Councilmember Jovanka Beckles, the city council needed more input from the public in order to make an informed decision. "It seems to me that we are putting the cart before the horse," she said at the meeting.

Her concern seemed to drive the discussion last Tuesday, September 26, with councilmembers Jael Myrick and Melvin Willis expressing similar sentiments.

The mayor, however, argued that there would be plenty of time for both the residents of North Richmond and also the city of Richmond to back out if the situation was not agreeable.

“The residents and businesses in unincorporated North Richmond will have a full opportunity to vote on this proposition,” he said. “No matter what we do, if a majority of the community does not want to do it, then they can stop it.”

Lou Ann Texeira, a representative from Contra Costa’s Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), explained that all it would take is a single statement of protest from a registered voter or homeowner to throw the decision into public forum.

At that point, if written protests were received from more than 25 percent of the qualified population, the matter would be decided in a vote by North Richmond residents.

Beckles appeared concerned with the logistics of that process, claiming that requiring a written statement places an extra burden on communities of color. She said there were merits to other options, though, such as voting.

City Manager Bill Lindsay pointed out that, as an alternative to Richmond initiating the process, residents of North Richmond could bring annexation to a vote by submitting an application to LAFCO by petition, which would require the support of 25 percent of registered voters and homeowners. Alternatively, Contra Costa County could put forth an advisory measure to gauge public support.

Butt said that the county has shown no interest in spending additional costs and resources for such an option.

As for public opinion, only three speakers addressed the council on the matter. And they were equally as divided.

Mike Parker, a member of the Richmond Progressive Alliance claimed that North Richmond was a part of the city in every sense, “except in the way that somebody drew the lines.” He added that the community should begin the annexation process as a gesture of goodwill.

Henry Clark, a North Richmond resident and member of the municipal advisory council, said that annexation was an attempt at gentrification, and North Richmond did not need any help from the city.

“We’re taking care of ourselves,” he said.

Robert Rogers, a district coordinator in Supervisor John Gioia’s office, also spoke at the meeting. He explained that current North Richmond residents represent less than a third of a percent of eligible voters in the county. As a part of Richmond, they would represent 3 percent.

At this point in the process, there appear more questions than answers—a fact compounded by an inquiry raised by another public speaker, Don Gosney.

“Do the people of Richmond want this to happen,” he asked.

“How exactly will we benefit from this?”

Filed under: [Development](#), [Featured](#), [Front](#), [Gentrification](#), [Government](#)

Tagged: [Annexation](#), [city council meeting](#), [North Richmond](#)

One Comment

1.  *Jarmon Kelly*

[October 4, 2017 at 6:42 am](#)

It feels like buying a neighbors car that's always been broke that we feel we can fix. It has value in the land and rights but the air is bad, crime is unchecked and we take on all the assumed risk. If we're helping as a reason then by all means forge through make it happen but if the money, taxes and land is a driving force... It'll bite you in the end. You don't go into foster care for the money you'll mess up a lot of kids. You don't slow or speed up annexing North Richmond for the same reason.