

Board delays final water decision

NIPOMO — Directors of the Community Services District decided Wednesday to delay their reversal of the Nov. 5 State Water Project election in the hope that time will act like a bridge over troubled voters.

"We're postponing it to let tempers cool down a bit," David Manriquez said before the meeting. "We want to mull it over."

In a raucous meeting that included sharp criticism of the board last week, the NCSO directors voted 4-1 to approve the first reading of an ordinance that would allow the directors to overrule the voters' 349-325 rejection of state water.

Second reading and final adoption of the ordinance had been scheduled Wednesday, but that action was postponed to Dec. 18 at Manriquez's suggestion.

District General Manager Ryder Ray said board members have raised the idea of mailing out information on the district's need for state water, but two weeks is not much time to compile newsletters in a form that makes sense and then mail them out.

"Things are going awfully quick. Let's just slow it down," Manriquez said, noting that the Board of Supervisors does not have to make its final decision on

bringing state water to the county until the end of January.

In addition to letting tempers cool, he said he wants to allow time for the board to consider other sources of water and the legal consequences of overturning a vote that had been intended to be binding.

He said the board would be examining second opinions by legal experts on whether the election could be overturned.

"We have information on things that fit in this general area," Manriquez said. "We're looking at the legalities."

He declined to say whether the new information supports or contradicts the legal advice given by the district's attorney, Art Shaw, who has said the board could reverse the voters' decision.

The new legal information "is just in the board members' hands. It's just information for us to read," Manriquez said.

He said the ordinance that is now halfway to adoption will allow the district directors to overturn the election results, but it doesn't represent a final decision on the issue.

"Subscribing to state water hasn't really been decided yet," he said. "There will be a lot of ramifications on down the line.

We need to see whether state water is viable."

However, Manriquez said those statements do not indicate that he or the other board members who voted in the majority last week have changed their minds about overturning the vote.

Director Steven Small, the lone dissenter in last week's vote, is also adamant about not changing his mind.

He said he supports the idea of importing state water but could not oppose the election results.

"I kept telling people it was going to be binding. It bothers me from a credibility standpoint," he said.

"I definitely don't like the way things are going. It's become a moral issue with me now," he said. "I thought we were really off base."

"I'm not going to change the way I feel," Small said. "I'll be voting 'no' on it if the proposal is to overturn the vote."

Ray said the state water issue has no bearing on the board's deliberations over changing the district's no-annexation policy.

The proposed Dana Middle School will need about 12 acre-feet of water a year, and the Summit Station area will need about 70, he said. "We have the water to do it."