

SM hosts public meeting on lawsuit

► Council will have special session to provide details, educate the community

BY **KIRSTEN FLAGG**
STAFF WRITER

Santa Maria's City Council will host a special meeting Monday evening aimed at educating the community about the details and potential impacts of the proposed settlement to the Santa Maria Valley groundwater litigation.

Dwayne Chisam, the city's

utility manager, city council members, and Eric Garner, the lawyer representing the city in the litigation, will answer questions about the history of the lawsuit as well.

"It's a very complex case, very difficult to understand unless you're a water attorney and it's very difficult to cover in the paper," said City Manager Tim Ness. "We thought it would be a

good idea to make sure that we attempt to provide public education as much as possible."

The city is especially interested in answering the questions of landowners in the area who must decide by Sept. 27 whether to sign a settlement, Ness said.

The settlement was crafted by the majority of the major parties in the suit, but many of the smaller landowners may not have been involved in the process. Anyone who does not sign the settlement could forfeit their right to the terms of the settlement and be required to

participate in a closing trial.

The fight over the Santa Maria Valley Groundwater Basin started eight years ago when the Santa Maria Valley Water Conservation District sued Santa Maria, Guadalupe and Cal Cities Water Company over perceived threats to the groundwater basin.

The district feared Santa Maria would bank its imported State Water in the basin, thus eroding the traditional superior water rights of agriculturists.

See **LAWSUIT** / B2

LAWSUIT:

Continued from page B1

At the court's order, Santa Maria was forced to file a cross-complaint against anyone owning 10 or more acres in the Santa Maria Valley.

The case quickly ballooned to include hundreds of municipalities, private companies

and land owners from Pismo Beach to Orcutt.

The special meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. Monday at Santa Maria City Hall, 110 E. Cook St.

For more information, call the city's utilities department at 929-0951, Ext. 7270.

Kirsten Flagg can be reached at 739-2206 or kflagg@santamariatimes.com.