

Pipeline charge letters sent to property owners

Workshops set to answer questions

By Mike Hodgson/Associate Editor

Letters telling property owners how many benefit units are assigned to their land for the proposed supplemental water assessment district began hitting Nipomo mailboxes last Saturday.

About 8,000 letters were sent out after Nipomo Community Services District directors unanimously approved the wording and mailing Jan. 11.

NCSD is working on a plan to pipe supplemental water from Santa Maria to reduce the amount pumped from the Nipomo Mesa groundwater basin.

The district and three other water purveyors would finance the project with bonds, which would then be repaid using property assessments — if property owners agree to form an assessment district.

Each parcel would be assessed based on the number of benefit units it is assigned.

The letters sent out last week identify each property in the proposed district, explain how it is categorized and specify how many benefit units are assigned to it.

NCSD General Manager Michael LeBrun said the district has scheduled four community workshops to answer questions about the letters.

The first one is scheduled for 7 p.m. Monday at Mesa Middle School for Rural Water Co. customers.

Additional workshops are set for 3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 28, at Nipomo High School for NCSD and Golden State Water Co. customers; 6:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 30, at Trilogy Monarch Dunes; and 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 1, at NHS for district and Golden State customers.

“What we’re going to do is take the first 20 or so minutes and give a recap of what we’ve talked about in our previous town hall meetings,” LeBrun said.

“Then, we’ll turn it over to Kari Wagner, our assessment engineer, who will walk folks through their questions on what the letter is about, what a benefit unit is, what the costs are and the options for increasing or decreasing the amount of benefits assigned to their property.”

LeBrun said only about 20 percent of properties within the proposed assessment district will qualify to increase or decrease their benefit units.

Those are parcels that are either vacant or only partially developed.

LeBrun said a property owner might want to reduce the benefit units assigned to a parcel to lower the assessment amount.

On the other hand, a property owner might want to increase benefit units if the number assigned doesn't support the full potential development of the parcel but the owner plans to fully develop it.

"They would want to pay that assessment now," LeBrun said. "It will be less expensive for that property owner to buy in now.

"Say they have one home on the property, and 10 years from now they want to tear that down and build six homes," he explained. "But they've only reserved pipeline capacity for one home.

"They will pay a burden for late participation and a burden to offset the cost to other customers who did participate.

"It's not a penalty because you didn't play," LeBrun added. "It's that other people did play and pay, and this is to cover their costs of playing."

A policy governing benefit change requests also was approved by the NCSD board last week.

Under the policy, requests will be granted based on changes to future development potential or if an error was made in determining existing or future development potential.

Owners who request a decrease must record a deed restriction limiting future development. Those who request an increase only have to record a district-approved waiver and consent form.

Property owners have until Thursday, Feb. 16, to request changes.

LeBrun said the staff plans to submit a list of qualified requests to directors for approval at the board meeting set for 9 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 29.