

## Nipomo rejects pipeline proposal

District could now raise rates, place a moratorium on new hookups or pursue rationing

By Cynthia Lambert | [clambert@thetribunenews.com](mailto:clambert@thetribunenews.com)

By Cynthia Lambert The Tribune

The Nipomo Community Services District boardroom was quiet Thursday afternoon while some local residents watched as the final ballots were counted to determine the fate of a nearly \$26 million project to bring water to the area from Santa Maria.

The silence continued even after district General Manager Michael LeBrun announced the results: The measure had failed, gaining just 48 percent approval from property owners in voting weighted according to proposed land assessments.

Nipomo Community Services District officials were leading the effort to form an assessment district by asking property owners of 8,077 parcels whether they would agree to levy a tax to cover the capital cost of constructing a pipeline to transport water to the Nipomo Mesa.

“I think the community missed a real opportunity,” LeBrun said. “I guess time will tell.” Now, district officials have to determine their next steps. They could debate whether to try to increase water rates for customers to pay for the construction, or try to reduce consumption through water rationing or by imposing a moratorium on new water hookups.

The board directed LeBrun to return May 23 with options for members to start the discussion.

“Would going back with a rate increase incense the community?” LeBrun said. “We don’t know. That will be up to the board. Their job is to listen to the voices of the community.”

District officials say the pipeline — and the water it would bring — is necessary to reduce overpumping of its only source of water, an underground aquifer, and to prevent saltwater intrusion — the pollution of a freshwater aquifer by seawater creeping underground and moving inland.

However, they faced a groundswell of opposition from residents, including those who formed a group called Mesa Community Alliance, which questioned the project’s cost and the reliability of the Santa Maria water, while asserting that increased water usage has not affected the overall well levels.

“Residents of the Mesa have spoken,” said Pat Eby, an MCA member. In a statement, the group said it does not believe this vote was the last word on the issue.

“MCA believes we have a challenge to ensure we have an adequate water supply in the long term,” the statement read. “We hope to work with the county and other responsible agencies on a long-range plan to provide an alternative water source and to protect our groundwater supply.”

The proposed assessment district would have included those who receive water from the Nipomo district, Golden State Water Co., Rural Water Co. and Woodlands Mutual Water Co.

The district received 4,834 ballots from property owners, with each ballot weighted according to the dollar amount of the proposed assessment to each owner’s property. The value of the ballots cast against the project totaled nearly \$7.5 million, while those in favor came to about \$6.9 million.

Of the 4,834 ballots, 1,498 were in favor and 3,336 were against forming the assessment district.

To date, the district has spent about \$4 million on the pipeline project for costs including environmental work, design and outreach.

Of that, about \$3 million came from a portion of fees paid when a home is connected to the district’s water delivery system. The fees were raised in 2005 specifically for the purpose of bringing additional water to the community, LeBrun said.

Read more here: <http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2012/05/10/2062810/nipomo-rejects-pipeline-proposal.html#storylink=cpy>

Mary Malone 1 comment collapsed

Collapse Expand Are you kidding me? The votes of the rich carried more weight than those of the regular folks? How in the world did the Nipomo CSD get away with that scam?

If you go by the way other votes are done, one ballot = one vote, only 31% of the voters approved the assessment, and 69% opposed it.

But it looks better for the Nipomo CSD and the other water companies if they rig the vote so that they can claim 51% disapproved and 49% approved.

Even though the crooked election could not be rigged, and the measure was voted down, Nipomo CSD’s general manager, Michael Lebrun, said they would probably still go forward and finish the design!

That is correct. They are going to continue to work on the Nipomo CSD Vanity Pipeline to Nowhere, against the will of the people.

If they do, the board members and Lebrun should get the bill for it.

Read more here: <http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2012/05/10/2062810/nipomo-rejects-pipeline-proposal.html#storylink=cpy>