

Trustees vote 'no' on pipeline district

By Mike Hodgson/Associate Editor

Lucia Mar Unified School District trustees last week chose to cast a “no” vote on forming an assessment district to pay for a proposed pipeline to bring supplemental water to the Nipomo Mesa.

Lucia Mar’s votes were added to the more than 4,782 ballots an independent team of auditors began counting Wednesday evening in the Nipomo Community Services District office following a public hearing that started at 1 p.m.

If all the ballots had not be tallied by 9 p.m., the counting was expected to continue Thursday morning, NCS D General Manager Michael LeBrun said.

Although LeBrun expected to announce the totals at a special meeting set for 3 p.m. Thursday, the results were not available by press time.

If 50 percent, by dollar value, of the ballots favored forming the assessment district, NCS D will be able to build a pipeline to bring water from Santa Maria to the Mesa.

LeBrun said with funding assured by the assessments, construction on the pipeline could start later this year, with completion and water deliveries expected in 2014.

“If the measure fails, the water resources future of the area and ability of the water agencies to reliably provide water to current customers and to support the county planned growth for the area becomes unclear,” LeBrun said.

Lucia Mar trustees voted 4-2 to cast a “no” vote on the ballots for six parcels it owns within the proposed assessment district.

Trustee Vern Dahl recused himself, citing a conflict of interest, and board President Dawn Hinchman and Trustee Colleen Martin cast the dissenting votes.

“Obviously, they feel there should be some other method of paying for it,” Hinchman said of the majority.

Hinchman said she didn’t know whether the school district petitioned to reduce the number of benefit units assigned to its properties, as San Luis Obispo County did.

But LeBrun said Lucia Mar did not appeal the number of units assigned by the assessment engineer.

“They did not exercise that option — but they could have,” LeBrun said. “And they were given every prompt and opportunity to do so.”

Lucia Mar’s parcels — Dana, Dorothea Lange and Nipomo elementary, Mesa Middle and Lopez and Nipomo high schools — were assigned a total of 132.18 benefit units, 21.1 of those considered “undeveloped.”

That translates to a total of \$177,116 in assessments, or 0.8 percent of the total \$21.46 million in proposed assessments.

If the assessment district is formed, Lucia Mar could cut that assessment to \$148,862 by paying it in advance in a lump sum.

Otherwise, the district would be paying \$13,827 a year for 30 years for a grand total of \$414,825.