

SanLuisObispo.com

[Next Story >](#)

Robber sought in holdups of two Morro Bay businesses

Water reigns in Nipomo election

Published: October 18, 2012

Services district candidates' views range from revisiting pipeline to building desalination plant

By Cynthia Lambert — clambert@thetribunenews.com

The candidates for the Nipomo Community Services District board of directors agree the unincorporated community needs to find another source of water for its approximately 12,000 residents.

But that's where their similarities diverge.

The four candidates — running for two seats on the five-member board — differ in their views on a controversial proposal to buy water from Santa Maria. They also have varying ideas about what type of project the district should pursue, and how district officials can improve relations with the public. The candidates include incumbent Ed Eby, who has served eight years on the board; Craig Armstrong, a retired financial executive and certified public accountant; Bob Blair, a former district board member from 1994 to 2004; and Ernie Thompson, a former district employee who retired in 2006.

Earlier this year, residents on the Nipomo Mesa considered a plan to fund a \$26 million pipeline project that Nipomo district officials said was necessary to bring a supplemental water source to the community.

The area relies on water from an underground aquifer, which district leaders say is being depleted faster than it's being replenished.

The proposal failed, garnering 48 percent approval in voting weighted according to proposed land assessments.

Two candidates, Blair and Thompson, said they voted against the plan. During a candidate forum in Nipomo on Wednesday, Blair argued the district board is moving ahead with a pipeline project even though most residents said they didn't want it.

"These people are running this place, going ahead full-steam like you didn't say anything," said Blair. "I don't think that's a way to run a business."

He suggested the district work with oil companies to see whether they might help finance a desalination plant or other ways to reclaim water and replenish the aquifer.

While Thompson, 69, voted against the pipeline plan as a property owner, he said Thursday he didn't want to "throw rocks at NCSA." Instead, the vote prompted him to get involved in finding an alternative solution.

The district board has moved ahead with studying a phased approach to the pipeline project. In September, the board approved an amended contract with AECOM Technology Corp. to finalize the design of the first phase of the project.

However, board members have said they would not move ahead with construction of a project until the board hears a report next year from a committee formed shortly after the pipeline vote failed.

The Supplemental Water Alternatives Evaluation Committee is re-examining alternative ways to bring additional water to Nipomo.

Candidate Armstrong, 68, is a member of the committee. He voted in favor of the pipeline project but says he's approaching all options with an open mind.

"I think we're acting in an independent and aggressive manner," Armstrong said of the committee. "I don't want to be viewed as a rubber stamp for the board's agenda."

Armstrong said he'd work to ensure that approval of water connections for any new development is dependent on having sufficient proven water reserves to support the project.

As a board member, Eby, 70, voted in favor of forming an assessment district to fund the pipeline.

But now, he said, he'll wait to see what the committee suggests before making a decision.

"Whatever is the cheapest, fastest solution is what I'll support," Eby said.

He also doesn't support any alternative that raises property taxes, saying that property owners gave the district "a resounding no" in May.

The first phase of a pipeline project, if the district chooses to go that route, could be funded with state grant money, existing district funds (some collected from connection fees from new development) or by issuing a bond that's secured with existing property tax revenue the district receives annually.

Public participation

On the issue of increasing public involvement in the Nipomo district, Blair suggested the board hold meetings at night so more people can attend.

Thompson agreed, adding, "You own the district. You need to be a participant in the meetings and be involved."

Eby mentioned the board recently voted to hire a public information assistant.

Armstrong said he urged the board to create a periodic community newsletter to better inform residents.

[Back to Top](#)

[< Previous Story](#)

SLO College Night offers answers for those seeking higher education

[Next Story >](#)

Robber sought in holdups of two Morro Bay businesses