

Ballots cast on Nipomo pipeline project

Locals will find out Thursday whether they will pay for Santa Maria water project

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Cynthia Lambert The Tribune

Nipomo Mesa residents will learn today whether they will pay to fund construction of a pipeline to bring additional water to the area from Santa Maria.

Over the past seven weeks, property owners of 8,077 parcels have been able to vote on whether to levy a tax to cover the pipeline's estimated \$26 million capital cost.

The balloting ended Wednesday at a public hearing at the Nipomo Community Service District's office, which is leading efforts to form an assessment district to pay for the pipeline. The tabulation will be overseen by members of the League of Women Voters.

The results will be announced at a special meeting at 3 p.m. today.

If the assessment district moves ahead, some residents could pay from \$120 to \$225 a year for 30 years to fund the construction costs, though many others could pay at least double that, depending on the size of their property, type of use and other factors.

The district covers customers who receive water from the Nipomo district, Golden State Water Co., Rural Water Co. and Woodlands Mutual Water Co.

The assessment would cover only the cost of construction. If the vote is successful, the Nipomo district would then seek to raise water rates to cover the costs of the deliveries from Santa Maria, at which time residents affected by the rate increase would have a chance to vote against it.

It would be up to the individual companies to raise rates to cover their share of the water costs.

More than 60 people attended Wednesday's meeting. More than a dozen people spoke; many voiced opposition to the pipeline and questioned the reliability of the water coming from Santa Maria.

Opponents have also argued the district has not been forthright about the true cost of the project and dispute the benefit that some customers might receive from new water. For example, Rural Water Co. would have to build a pipeline to tap into the new supply.

"This is not new water," argued Bill Petrick, a member of Mesa Community Alliance, a group of residents opposed to the district's plan. "New water is desalination or recycling — anything that didn't exist in the basin before. It's a mistake."

District officials say the pipeline is necessary to reduce the area's dependence on 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.

“If you get a chance to get water ... take it,” said Nipomo resident Sam Scarbrough, speaking for himself and his wife, Mary. “It’s a rare supply here in California.”

The Nipomo district board also considered some changes to a few of the amounts assessed to specific properties. In one case, a property owner outside of the Rural Water Co. area was included in the assessment district, said Nipomo district General Manager Michael LeBrun.

The property was removed, but doing so leaves that water company with an additional \$91,000 to contribute to cover its share of the construction cost, LeBrun said. It was not immediately clear Wednesday how Rural Water Co. would make that payment if the assessment district moves ahead.

Read more here: <http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2012/05/09/2061289/ballots-cast-on-nipomo-pipeline.html#storylink=cpy>