

Calaveras County Water District axes Highway 4 water study

By Claudette Langley

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A proposal for a regional study of water and wastewater services along the Highway 4 corridor dried up Wednesday at the Calaveras County Water District board meeting.

CCWD directors decided to return \$28,000 in grant funding to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy after determining that the project it was to fund was not going to fly. Ed Pattison, water resource manager, applied for and received a grant totaling \$68,000 in 2007 to facilitate a regional study of water and wastewater providers along the corridor.

"To date, we have spent \$40,000," Pattison said Wednesday. He added that CCWD had provided its matching share of \$36,000 of the total and would be looking for some reimbursement. The project got off to an energetic start when about 50 representatives from the area's service providers gathered at Ironstone Vineyards in November 2008.

The group listened to Kenneth D. Landau, assistant executive officer for the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, who said that collaboration was really the only saving grace for smaller systems in the ever more regulated and costly world of wastewater.

Landau's warning was still ringing in the ears of CCWD Director Phil McCartney Wednesday.

"Landau from the state said we have to work together or we could be in danger of having state revolving loan funds pulled from all of us," McCartney said.

McCartney ultimately abstained from the vote that kiboshed the project. Directors Jeff Davidson, Don Stump and Dennis Dooley moved the action to sign off on the project and return the money to the Conservancy.

The only no vote came from Director Bob Dean, who argued that it didn't seem right for CCWD to make the unilateral decision to end the proposed study. He recommended that the board table the issue for a couple of months to give all the other service providers an opportunity to bring the project to their boards and come back with decisions.

"This is very shortsighted," Dean said. "We have time and, given the historic acrimony, this sounds like an 'up yours' kind of attitude."

However, he needn't worry about that perception, at least from the Utica Power Authority. Verne Pyle, UPA general manager, was at Wednesday's CCWD meeting and listened to the discussion about the grant.

"I think it's great that they made this decision," he said. "Nobody really knows what's going on with it and none of the other agencies had even seen the grant."

Pyle added that the decision to ditch the broad regional effort would free up CCWD to work one on one with the agencies.

Wednesday's decision followed a meeting at the end of March in which all the players gathered around the table at UPA's offices. At that meeting, representatives from Angels Camp, UPA, Murphys Sanitary District, Union Public Utility District and the Board of Supervisors pondered what to do with the grant money that was left.

A general consensus was reached that all of the agencies except CCWD didn't have enough information or understanding of the project. It was decided that each of the representatives would take the grant to their respective boards and get some official direction.

On Wednesday, however, Stump and Dooley, who had spearheaded the movement to bring the districts together, admitted defeat and said that it was clear to them that other service providers just weren't interested in the study.

"I interpreted what was presented at that meeting as saying 'thanks but no thanks,'" Dooley said. "They just weren't interested in participating in this."

Stump and Dooley said the approach from this point on should be to wait for the other agencies to come to CCWD with their own proposals.

"As far as I am concerned, we are open to have them bring us any type of partnership," Stump said. "I just don't think the regional concept is going to be functional. There are just too many historic issues to overcome."

Pattison listened to the discussion and noted the vote.

"I will write Sierra Nevada Conservancy and let them know we are signing off on this," he said.

In other business, the board approved a three-party lease for Courtwright-Emerson Memorial Ballpark in Arnold. The agreement among Calaveras County, CCWD and the Courtwright-Emerson Ballpark Foundation clears the way for the softball games to continue in the park and for a number of recreational enhancements.

"What you have before you is the draft that we discussed with the county," said Pat Emerson, director of administrative services. "We have added some protections for CCWD. This lease makes the foundation heavily responsible for the improvements and provides CCWD the right to intercede if we think the foundation is not performing well."

The agreement allows some of \$1.2 million the county received from the Proposition 40 Per Capita Program, a \$326 million fund created by the state of California for parks and recreational area improvements, to be used at the park.

"This has been run by the state and will fly as it meets the requirements (for Proposition 40)," Emerson said.

The board voted 5-0 to approve the lease.

Another item involving state legislation brought resounding rebellion from the CCWD directors. Pattison was before the board with a proposition that the district sign on in support of the \$11 billion water bond that comes before California voters in November. Known as the Safe, Clean

and Reliable Drinking Water Supply Act of 2010, the money would be used to pay for sweeping reforms of the state's water infrastructure voted in by the Legislature in November 2009.

Pattison warned his directors that if the bond doesn't pass, the financial burden will fall on California's water districts to implement the reforms included in the legislative package. However, CCWD's directors were skeptical about that outcome.

"How do we know that will happen (the districts carrying the financial burden)?" McCartney said. "Prove it to me."

Pattison ticked off a number of mandates, including new restrictive stream flow requirements that have to be reached as part of what is known as the "Delta solution." The crux of the legislation passed in November 2009 is to find answers to the increasing problem of the Delta failure.

Directors said that what the legislation is really about is forcing all of the state's water suppliers to conserve and change their operations in order to increase water supplies to San Joaquin County and Southern California.

"Only about a 10th of that bond is going to go the Sierra," Dean said. "There is virtually no consideration for us that provide about 60 percent of the water for the state."

After stating their concerns, the board members took a vote of 5-0 against supporting the bond. "That speaks volumes," Pattison said.

The Calaveras County Water District meets at 9 a.m. the second and fourth Wednesday of the month at 423 E. St. Charles St., San Andreas. For more information call 754-3543 or visit ccwd.org.