

[print](#)

Official: Antioch could lose water rights

by Dave Roberts

10.29.09 - 03:25 pm

Antioch is in danger of losing its century-old right to take water from the San Joaquin River, possibly resulting in a multi-million dollar increase in water costs for residents and businesses.

That was the warning to the City Council Tuesday night by Phil Harrington, Antioch director of capital improvements and water rights. The warning came in connection with state legislation now under consideration to deal with the state water supply, focusing on the Delta.

That legislation includes provision for a peripheral canal, several gate systems and other measures designed to preserve the Delta ecosystem while ensuring a reliable water supply for central and southern California farms, residents and businesses. The proposed canal in the west Delta would take water from the Sacramento River near Sacramento and send it south, bypassing much of the rest of the Delta.

“(The canal) would alter existing flow patterns in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and has the potential to cause a negative effect on the City’s ability to obtain water supplies from our current intake location in the western Delta,” wrote Harrington in a staff report. “(As a result), we could spend millions of dollars more each water year purchasing supplemental water supplies from local water districts. These losses would have to be recovered through our existing water rate structure.”

Antioch officials are not alone in their concern about the proposed state legislation, which includes a multi-billion-dollar bond measure for Delta facilities such as the peripheral canal, new reservoirs and levee reinforcement that voters might be voting on next year. Contra Costa County officials co-signed with several other Northern California counties and water agencies an Oct. 15 letter to state legislators asking them to not hurt their residents and customers.

“The current Delta package needs further work to ensure all regions of California are treated fairly,” the letter states. “In its current form, this legislation would harm Northern California. We ask that the Legislature withhold and oppose any vote on a water package until ... it assures that there are no redirected impacts to the Delta and Northern California and sufficient protections are in place to protect Northern California’s and the Delta’s water supplies. The Delta water package must fairly address the needs of Northern California, the economic viability and health of the Delta while assuring a reliable water supply for the entire state.”

Despite the dire warning in his report, council members made only a couple of comments after Harrington’s presentation. Councilwoman Martha Parsons noted that Antioch has been successful in conserving water. “We are doing great,” she said. “Our increase in population has not increased our intake of water.”

Harrington agreed, saying, "We have done fantastic and shown we can conserve." He cautioned that urban water use accounts for only 15 percent of total water usage statewide and that more agricultural conservation is needed. "There has to be more focus on the major water users in the state if we are going to make a dent." The water legislation includes a goal of reducing statewide water usage by 20 percent by 2020.

Mayor Jim Davis voiced a concern shared by other officials in Delta communities: that they have been under-represented on the various committees doing the water studies, drafting the legislation and implementing it when it's passed. Harrington suggested that city officials let state legislators know that they want a seat at the table, adding that ultimately the fate of the water plan will be up to the voters.

"Only the voters can stop it if they don't support this massive water bond act," he said. "The Delta will change. We are an interest and want to be a part of the process. Anyone you talk to (in Sacramento), also express the same interest. There's a lot of good things in the state (water) legislation, but there's a lot of hurdles that they have to get over. It's challenging, and I think will be challenging for many, many years to come."

Davis said voters should be asking the major party candidates for the 10th Congressional District about their position on the legislation. At a forum Monday, all five candidates on the Nov. 3 ballot, including Democrat John Garamendi and Republican David Harmer, opposed the peripheral canal.

In other council business, Councilman Reggie Moore took umbrage at a resident's accusation that he and Councilwoman Mary Rocha had improperly allowed the use of the city logo to publicize a church's Halloween party at the county fairgrounds. Moore said he had not given the church the OK to use the logo. Davis said the city attorney is putting together a policy on how city officials should provide support for community organizations and events.

The council also approved citywide design guidelines for site planning, landscape treatment, building design and signs.

© thepress.net 2009