

Coalition of Peninsula Businesses

A coalition to resolve the Peninsula water challenge to comply with the CDO at a reasonable cost

Members Include: Monterey County Hospitality Association, Monterey Commercial Property Owners' Association, Monterey Peninsula Chamber of Commerce, Carmel Chamber of Commerce, Pacific Grove Chamber of Commerce, Monterey County Association of Realtors, Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, Associated General Contractors-Monterey District, Pebble Beach Co.

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By Bob McKenzie

How do we want to live? How much water do we need?

It is easy to lose track of why our community is pursuing a water supply given the conversations about the 'three-legged stool,' known as the water supply project. We hear about the desal plant and its production capacity, Pure Water Monterey water recycling capacity and now its expansion possibilities, and Aquifer Storage and Recovery – the so-called 'three-legged stool' of our proposed water supply project.

So why are we pursuing these expensive projects?

The answer is simple: our community must stop illegal pumping from the Carmel River and find a way as a community to replace 70% of the water we use.

Why do we have to do this? Because the State Water Resources Control Board ordered us to.

Cal Am, our community's water supplier, proposed to use a desal plant of 6.4 million gallons per day (mgd) or 9.6 mgd production capacity to supply most of the replacement water. That water would be combined with water produced by recycling wastewater and ag irrigation and food processing water runoff (Pure Water Monterey) and aquifer storage and recovery water and stored for later use. These components would allow the community to stop overpumping the Carmel River.

Simple, right? Not even close.

Now, over two decades after the State Water Resources Control Board decided we only have a legal right to 30% of the water we use from the Carmel River and over four decades after the state legislature created the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District to solve our water supply problem we are still arguing about how to proceed.

Should we build a desal plant capable of producing 9.6 million gallons of water per day (mgd) or should we build a desal plant capable of producing 6.4 mgd? Or should the desal plant be smaller? Or should we eliminate a desal plant altogether? These are conversations that have taken place within public agencies in the last 60 days.

The original idea for our water supply project was to build a water recycling facility capable of turning sewer water and ag water runoff into drinking water at an anticipated rate of 3,500 acre feet of water per year (afa), or approximately 3 mgd. Such a plant is now under construction and is supposed to be producing water by late 2019 – but serious questions remain about the ability of the facility sustainably to produce 3,500 afa and the cost to do so.

In spite of those questions, now our community is arguing about whether enough source water (meaning, essentially, more ag irrigation runoff and ag processing runoff – the sewer water is almost all committed) can be secured and recycled to produce another 650 afa, or another 2,250 afa, or even another 3,570 afa? And this in spite of serious questions about the long-term availability of source water (two Salinas Valley planned ag processing facilities have been cancelled and one facility has announced it will relocate out of the county; research is ongoing to make ag processing into a closed-loop system meaning no water will ever leave the processing system) – or whether using it produce drinking water for the Peninsula community is even legal considering the prohibition on exporting Salinas Basin water.

Are we doomed to fulfill former Cal Am GM Craig Anthony's May 2011 observation that our community is filled with bright folks who are very good at solving problems, because every time a solution is found, a new alternative solution idea comes forward? Tempting, obviously, but we must not forget the second half of his observation: the time for new ideas is over!

Where are the public agencies who should be championing our water supply project, the 'three-legged stool' water supply project agreed to by the Coalition of Peninsula Businesses and several other parties; that is the only project that is realistic answer to our water supply problem and the only project that will provide a long-term solution.

Several of our public agencies appear to have become distracted by mostly out-of-area special interest groups and selfish residents promoting the idea of expanded water recycling at the expense of finishing a desal plant capable of providing us with a long-term, sustainable water supply. Note that most of these groups and individuals trying to squeeze our water supply to less than what we had a few years ago will not have to live with the consequences of continuing our 'water poverty' way of life.

These agencies are now also distracted by an offer from Marina Coast Water District – an avowed enemy of our desal plant – to temporarily loan us water to get us past some progress milestones set by the State Water Resources Control Board. Is MCWD willing to forego its promise to sue to stop the desal plant? No. Why trust the agency that has continued, over the past few years, tried to derail the desal project?

Is this the best the Peninsula community can do? Or can we develop a sustainable, long term water supply that provides for a reasonable standard of living for us all?

The central question is this: how do we want to live?

Can we secure a water supply that provides for building workforce housing, adding bathrooms for the convenience of residents, water so businesses can respond to changing customer preferences, water service to folks who have waited for years to use a lot that they own, allows landscaping in our parks, our homes

and in other public places? Have the special interest groups become that selfish that they take a 'we have it, you cannot' attitude?

The Coalition of Peninsula Businesses believes we can secure our 'three-legged stool' water supply solution at a level that will guarantee us – **GUARANTEE US** – a long term, adequate, sustainable water supply that fulfills the true water now and in the future for our community.

The Coalition of Peninsula Businesses continues to support the original 'three-legged stool' water supply project – a desal plant at a minimum of 6.4 million gallons per day, Pure Water Monterey at 3,500 acre feet per year, and Aquifer Storage and Recovery expansion.