

Between the Sheets

Monterey County Hospitality Association in Action: Monterey Peninsula moves toward a long-term water supply

By John Narigi, President, Coalition of Peninsula Businesses

On September 13, 2018, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) will decide whether to approve the Monterey Peninsula Water Supply Project (MPWSP) application filed by California American Water over six years ago.

If the CPUC approves, the communities of the Monterey Peninsula will finally see—after 40-plus years of trying—a safe, secure, stable and sustainable water supply that will end the environmentally damaging over-pumping of the Carmel River.

The CPUC will be guided in its decision by a “proposed decision” prepared by three Administrative Law Judges, including some assigned to the case at its inception six years ago. It includes more than 200 findings of fact and over 90 conclusions of law based on the evidence, exhibits, declarations and testimony filed in the case, plus the exhaustive and comprehensive Environmental Impact Report and Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) prepared by independent scientific experts who examined the project in detail.

The findings of fact in the proposed August 12 decision by three Administrative Law Judges concluded, based on law, the following:

- The projected water demand of 14,000 acre-feet annually (afa) is reasonable.
- Under-sizing the project would be a disservice to the public.
- The MPWSP is the most reasonable, long-term water supply solution, and the best option to ensure a sufficient future water source for Cal Am customers.
- The project will have the necessary legal water rights and will not be made infeasible over water rights concerns.
- The EIR/EIS is competent and comprehensive, and it complies with, meets or exceeds California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements.
- The project’s significant and unavoidable adverse impacts are outweighed by project benefits, including: 1) providing an adequate, reliable water supply for residents; 2) allowing Cal Am to cease illegal Carmel River diversions; 3) allowing Cal Am to cease extracting water beyond its allocated Seaside Groundwater Basin limit; 4) protecting and promoting the local economy; 5) significant benefits to the Carmel River; 6) arresting seawater intrusion into the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin; and 7) supplying reliable and clean municipal water to the Castroville area.
- The project’s Return Water Agreement ensures that the “Agency Act” prohibits exporting Salinas Valley Groundwater.
- The project will cause no harm to the groundwater or water supplies of Marina, Marina Coast Water District, or the agricultural community, and will, over time, benefit all Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin water users.
- Allows water for 1,100 lots of record.
- Allows 500 acre-feet of water for tourism bounce back.
- Expansion of Pure Water will not meet high water demand months, so directly states it’s not a viable solution.

- Because of the exigencies of the State Water Resources Control Board's Cease and Desist Order with milestones to meet in September 2018, there should be no further delays in approving the project. The final review and vote will occur on September 13, 2018, in San Francisco, by the CPUC Commissioners.

All must support the proposed decision. It is a must for our community to finally solve our water challenges.

The Monterey County Hospitality Association (www.mcha.net) is the trade association serving the local tourism industry with advocacy, education and employee recognition programs. John Narigi, Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa vice president & general manager, can be reached at info@mcha.net.