

Coalition of Peninsula Businesses

By Bob McKenzie, Consultant and John V. Narigi, President of the Coalition of Peninsula Businesses

We have a water project – can we keep it?

The Coalition of Peninsula Businesses and our community scored a major victory with the California Public Utilities Commission with a unanimous decision approving the Monterey Peninsula Water Supply Project (MPWSP), with the major component being the 6.4 desal plant. It also guarantees that the over pumping of the Carmel River will stop, which has been a long term priority of the Coalition.

But we still face challenges on our journey to the water supply project becoming a reality and satisfying the remaining milestones of the Cease and Desist Order.

First, two parties to the CPUC case (Marina Coast Water District and City of Marina) have sued in the California Supreme Court to overturn the CPUC approval and send the case back to the CPUC for additional study. Those two project opponents are joined in the plea to the Supreme Court by two local groups (Water Plus/Water Ratepayers Alliance of Monterey Peninsula and Public Water Now) who continue to oppose solving our water supply project.

The suits claim is deficiencies in the MPWSP environmental review.

Please remember, the CPUC delayed the processing of the project application eight times to allow for further environmental study of the project, alternatives to the project, and impacts of the project to the Salinas Valley and Marina-area groundwater supplies. In short, the environmental review was as exhaustive and comprehensive as humanly possible. The CPUC did approve the EIR & EIS in the overall approval of the project.

The same two parties who sued to overturn the project approval have also filed with the CPUC for a rehearing of the project application, a necessary procedural step before the Supreme Court can take any action. We should know in a couple of months if the CPUC will take up the MPWSP application again - which is doubtful in light of its unanimous decision approving the project. Not long after the CPUC rules on the motions for rehearing, the Supreme Court should decide the future of the case.

The second challenge is the Measure J initiative did pass. The initiative orders the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District to complete a feasibility study regarding the buyout of Cal Am. If determined it is feasible, what is the priority? The buyout of Cal Am or ensuring that the desal plant does get built and operating by 2021? The desal plant construction and operation by the CDO deadline of 2021 must remain a priority.

The Coalition will remain involved in monitoring the feasibility study and the priorities of MPWMD.

Cal Am is not for sale. So, if MPWMD tries to pursue its purchase, then we the community and rate payers are in for a very long and costly legal battle.

The passage of Measure J has the real potential of delaying or stopping the progress of the water supply project and successfully meeting the milestones of the CDO. By September 30th of 2019, the desal plant must be under construction per the CDO.

No question, the approved water supply project will continue to be hit with legal challenges. MPWMD, the Mayor's Authority and the community must remain focused on the construction of the desal plant which was approved unanimously by the CPUC.

The Coalition's mission will remain. To ensure a long-term sustainable water supply at the most reasonable price with educating the community on the actual facts.