

“Neighborhood Speak”-----by Steve Patterson—Federation of SR Neighborhoods

Recently, the Federation of SR Neighborhoods had the General Manager of MMWD, Paul Helliker come and speak about the current thinking at MMWD regarding water supplies, the future and conservation. What we learned was both interesting and also a bit concerning, as well.

The District has been actively been pursuing Desalinization as a possible source of nearly unlimited supply for portions of its water. The problem with that solution is that it is very capital intensive, not environmentally friendly, requiring tremendous electric energy to run, and would be very expensive for rate payers. Currently our water is already expensive and this option would spike those costs, dramatically. Our group was quite skeptical of this water pursuit and there was consensus that it not a good financially viable way to create new supplies. If anything MMWD should investigate joining with other agencies to form a Regional Desalination Project and spread out the huge potential costs to create some synergies and efficiencies.

Conservation has always been pursued by MMWD in its efforts to curb wasteful ways water is consumed. The District financially supports the installation of low flow toilets, showerheads and efficient washing machines. They will also do audits for property owners on how they use water in their yards and offer suggestions as to the types of landscaping that are planted. They will advise on how to make your outdoor areas more drought tolerant and use less water. Most of these efforts seem focused primarily on the single family home owner.

These conservation efforts have only partially pursued the total user-base and there's a feeling that new programs should be seriously considered:

- About 40% of Marin's population are renters. Renters typically do not pay for water, so are often completely unaware of water usage and water consumption. And while they may live in a unit with a low flow toilets or showerheads, real conservation begins with human behavior and that requires awareness of the problem. Most renters are just not aware and there are no well crafted programs by MMWD to assist property owners in this education process.
- There are over 100,000 jobs in Marin and again, while commercial buildings may be retrofitted with low flow devices, the occupants and business tenants of those buildings may have little or no awareness of the importance of water conservation. Many employees come from outside of Marin where water and water conditions are often different. Currently there are no fully developed MMWD programs aimed at this user base.
- Water meters in Marin are old and in some cases leak badly and waste huge amounts of water throughout the system. There are newer more technologically advanced meters currently available that MMWD should investigate and

implement on a systematic basis.

- In the summer time, nearly 50% of water consumption is for landscape irrigation water demands. Greater use and financial support for things like the use gray water and the use of household cisterns that would not only reduce water consumption, but lessen electricity consumption normally associated with MMWD reservoir pumping need to be made a priority.
- Many big public/private institutional users of water often waste it, unnecessarily. How many times have you seen massive lawn areas being watered right before a rain storm or water falling on sidewalks and running down the gutters? MMWD does no enforcement of water wasters, letting their rates just collect more dollars. And little is being done with the biggest consumer of all in Marin, San Quentin Prison. With enforcement you can conserve this precious vital natural resource.

And what about finding new sources for water? In 1992 the voters voted to build a new Russian River pipeline, but that was never built. It may not be feasible now. But some other supply options worth thinking about may include:

- The many thousands of acres that MMWD owns on its Mt Tam watershed are among the wettest spots in California and provide some of the most pristine drinking water as the reservoirs catch this wonderful run-off water. Why can't another reservoir be created? We are told that any new reservoir would create negative impacts in the streams and habitat of the Coho salmon. Does every stream in Marin serve as salmon habitat? Are there not some options that have no stream impact? This source provides a near perfect-quality of drinking water.
- What about a new pipeline from Lake Sonoma? This would tap a source that is available and could be used in tight supply situations.
- When the Novato Narrows Highway project gets underway why not expand the current pipeline at that time in conjunction with that project as a way to share some of the cost economies?

Clearly there are some very smart people at MMWD doing rigorous analysis of the water situation, conditions and options. But also seems that easy methods of conservation have made MMWD almost appear to have some "blind spots". Some of these same blind spots may extend to ways in which new supply can be generated. It would be good if there were more openness to water solutions with less of the "our way or the highway" thinking. If another dry year is on the way, all solutions should be on the table.

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