
PUBLIC COMMENTOR 233 - JEAN MARIE FOSTER, SEPTEMBER 24, 1996

203

Hi. I'm Jean Marie Foster. I'm representing the Sonoma County Taxpayers Association.

Mayor Wright:

Hold just a second. That speaker's not working -- that microphone is not working. Speak into it one more time Jean Marie.

JEAN MARIE FOSTER:

I'm Jean Marie Foster.

Mayor Wright:

It's not working. Hold on just a second.

JEAN MARIE FOSTER:

I will move over to the other --

Mayor Wright:

Okay, can someone check that microphone? Is there anyone here to check the mike?

Okay, thanks. So Becky, if you'll be prepared to go to this microphone too.

JEAN MARIE FOSTER:

By now you should know I'm Jean Marie Foster, representing the Sonoma County taxpayers association. The Sonoma County Taxpayers Association has been actively involved in tax issues of Sonoma County for over 50 years. We've been engaged in the wastewater issue for the past five years, and of all the various special interests, coalitions, stakeholders, groups, and governmental agencies participating in this process, the taxpayers association alone has consistently represented the interests of the rate payers. We have reviewed the Draft EIR for Santa Rosa subregional long-term wastewater disposal project, and we support its outcome. It's been very thorough.

Our own criteria for evaluating the various alternatives have been that the disposal project must meet all state and federal regulations regarding public health, protect Sonoma county's fragile waterways, be affordable to the rate payers of the subregional wastewater system, make a reasonable effort toward putting reclaimed water to the best possible reuse.

It is our conclusion that the primary cost driver for the project is not public safety or protection of the environment, as many would suppose; it is the commitment to water reuse that's driving the cost up. We concur with the Draft EIR that recycling reclaimed wastewater to the Laguna and back into the Russian River, the Laguna discharge 5(b), is the superior alternative. Not only is this the lowest cost alternative, but it clearly has the least negative impacts on the environment as well. The West County reclamation alternative has met with so much opposition from the very farmers it was intended to serve that it can't be a project worthy of consideration. The Geysers recharge alternative has received no support from the utility companies operating the geothermal energy plant, and as such is not worthy of consideration.

204

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The South County reclamation alternative has received a great deal of support from environmentalists. We find this proposal fatally flawed. The South County reclamation plan has a price tag of 350 million dollars. Rates would increase over their current levels by 11 to 14 dollars per household per member per month. Hookup fees for new homes would be increased by \$7,300 to \$9,400. These will be some of the highest sewage rates and hookup fees in the nation. These expenditures are justified by a cost benefit analysis that heavily weighs the valuable contribution reclaimed water can make to agricultural jobs and increased farm land values. The problem is, who's paying and who's benefiting? It will cost about \$87,000 for every one of 4000 jobs created. Half of these jobs will be low paying farm work; the other half installing and managing the irrigation program.

206

207

If reclaimed water is truly a valuable resource, wouldn't the beneficiaries be funding the program? As it is, irrigators do not expect to so much as buy their own sprinklers.

208

Laguna discharge costing -- although I've heard differently tonight -- Laguna discharge costing 49 million would require only a 25 cent increase per household member per month, and hookup fees would be reduced from their current levels by \$2400. Discharge flunks the cost benefit analysis test. Why? It doesn't create any jobs. But then again, it doesn't cost much to not create these jobs. The advantage of leaving this money in the local community to support local businesses and local jobs is not part of the analysis.

209

The South County reclamation alternative carries a heavy ecological toll. Storage reservoirs will flood sensitive plant communities such as oak woodlands, native grasslands, riparian woodlands and fresh water marsh. Storage reservoirs will also cut off natural stream flows downstream, significantly affecting additional aquatic habitats.

210

211

Two endangered species, the red legged frogs and the northwestern pond turtle are significantly impacted by this alternative. State and federal law requires that these environmental impacts be fully mitigated. Included in the Draft EIR are compensatory measures under the sensitive biological resource conservation program requiring the purchase of an additional reservoir site for mitigation. This means that not only one but two sites will be taken for farmers. A Tolay lake project could still require condemnation of two rock for mitigation purposes or vice-versa. A winter discharge into the Laguna would not impact native vegetation or endangered species. It would require no mitigation. The release of advance treated wastewater into the Laguna would have no adverse impact on public health. By every measurable standard, wastewater is cleaner

212

213

214

than the river. Advance treated wastewater is clean and safe. It's safe for people and it's safe for wildlife. The Laguna is an impaired wet land. An infusion of fresh water would actually be beneficial. It's also important to remember a 20 percent winter discharge is the worst case scenario and would only occur during extreme drought. 95 percent of the time, the discharge rate would actually be four percent.

215

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Mayor Wright:

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Are you wrapping up? Your time's up.

JEAN MARIE FOSTER :

Yes, thank you.

It's clear that -- okay, let me just shorten this up a little bit. Perhaps the greatest irony is that an expensive project would actually encourage growth. The mandate of the subregional system is to provide disposal based on the current general plans of Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Cotati, and Sebastopol. If a reuse project with high infrastructure costs is adopted and cities fail to meet their growth projections, cost per capita goes up.

Increased developments, on the other hand, could cause per capita costs to drop. This is a stimulus for growth. The discharge alternative works just the opposite. Only if cities exceeded their projections will expensive additional storage be needed. High sewage rates will not limit growth, although they could eliminate low income housing. The Sonoma County taxpayers association will continue to monitor this project for the rate payers. Thank you.

218

Mayor Wright:

Becky Lepori, followed by Tristan Warner, followed by Dr. Martin Griffin.