

Ukiah Daily Journal – May 11, 2014

Ukiah City Council Torn About Redwood Valley Water Issue

Members concerned about supporting sprawl, asking Ukiahans to conserve

By **JUSTINE FREDERIKSEN** *Ukiah Daily Journal*

UPDATED: 05/11/2014 02:12:10 PM PDT

The Ukiah City Council Wednesday approved sending a letter to state water officials declaring its support for a project that would help provide surplus water to Redwood Valley, but said it will hold a much longer discussion before deciding if it would actually be providing that water.

The Redwood Valley County Water District, which is under severe water restrictions, asked the city to express its support for an infrastructure project that would allow the district to get more water in the event of an emergency, and to express its intention to provide some of that water.

"This is more than simply dealing with a temporary drought issue," said Mayor Phil Baldwin, explaining that if the proposed interties between the valley's water districts were upgraded, "more water will become available, which would allow for more projects."

"I do have concerns about the growth inducement," said Council member Steve Scalmanini. "I don't oppose this idea (of supporting the intertie upgrade), but I'd have concerns about the big picture of development. My understanding is development has never been limited (in Redwood Valley), and it looks like they may be full up there."

Council member Benj Thomas said he preferred that "undesirable growth" be tackled directly, not by withholding water. "If we want to control sprawl, we ought to have the right tools," Thomas said. "I think we should be very open and direct about these things."

Scalmanini suggested that the council offer to "share water with Redwood Valley when the (Mendocino County) Board of Supervisors puts a moratorium on more developments. Otherwise, we become a bailout for overbuilding in other parts of the county."

Redwood Valley resident Rosalind Peterson then addressed the board, explaining that since the RVCWD has not become a part of the Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District, it continues to have "no water rights between May and November. It walked itself into this problem years and years ago and has hoped for a bailout ever since, when they could have annexed (with the flood control district) a long time ago."

When Baldwin asked Peterson what she would recommend, she said she was "not opposed to Redwood Valley getting water, but any water you give them has to be for a very limited time. **They need to figure out a solution."**

Peterson also suggested that the city support the flood control district's effort to get the rights to another 6,000 acre feet of Lake Mendocino storage. It currently distributes 8,000 acre feet, and Peterson said the extra water would "alleviate some of our situation."

City Attorney David Rapport then reminded the council that the action it was considering Wednesday was to "write a letter saying that you may be willing to provide water, and it specifically says the decisions about whether you're going to do that or not have yet to be made."

Another audience member asked if giving more water to Redwood Valley would cause the city to move from a voluntary, or Level 1, drought response to a mandatory, or Level 2, response.

Public Works Director Tim Eriksen said Wednesday's action would not, but "the following one very well might. The decision to share water could very well do that."

"We are once again in a drought situation, and are going to be under the pressure of empathy and compassion," said Baldwin, recalling that in the drought of 2009, the city had enough water "for our citizens, but we cut back primarily out of empathy and compassion for our neighbors. And it may be even more drastic this time. We'll probably approve this letter, then come July the council will feel some tremendous pressure. And let's hope a thousand people come here and help us make a decision.

"Would you take us to Level 2, basically where everyone's lawns go brown, to share water with Redwood Valley?" Baldwin asked the room, and Thomas said he felt there was the possibility of choosing less drastic scenarios.

"I think there are different levels there," he said. "But I would do almost anything to make sure that families in Redwood Valley have drinking water."

City Manager Jane Chambers advised the council that the city wouldn't be in the same situation this year as in 2009, "because we do have different resources this time around," such as new wells.

"I will be supporting this letter, but I will be calling people and knocking on doors to find out to what extent Ukiahans want to conserve to help our neighbors to the north and south," Baldwin said. "If it does come down to us constraining, **I would agree that the moratorium on new development should become a ban in Redwood Valley until they can show that they have a water right to support the dwellings they're going to create.**"

The council then voted unanimously to send a letter supporting the intertie project, but it did not determine if it has surplus water to share.

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