

COUNCIL SEES HOPE IN REGIONAL WATER PLAN

PINE
CONE

By MARY BROWNFIELD

3.7.08

THE GREATEST obstacle to securing a viable water supply for the Monterey Peninsula is the failure of cities, the county and various agencies that have a stake in it to work together, Lyndel Melton told the Carmel City Council Tuesday.

At the March 4 meeting, Melton, principal of RMC Water and Environment, said his firm had been hired to develop a sustainable water supply program for the Monterey County Regional Plenary Oversight Group, known as REPOG. Melton and other representatives of the group, which was formed by the California Public Utilities Commission Division of Ratepayer Advocates, have been visiting cities and other agencies to describe their plan and generate support.

Using a combination of several different approaches — some long contemplated, others innovative — the regional plan would be “implementable, sustainable,

and publicly and politically acceptable,” according to Melton, as well as less expensive than the Moss Landing desal plant proposed by California American Water Co.

“This solves many issues with the same investment,” he said. “It’s a multi-agency, multi-beneficiary solution.”

The goal is to reverse seawater intrusion in the Salinas Valley, reduce to legal levels — if not completely eliminate — pumping from the Carmel River, and provide cities with the water they need for legal lots of record and municipal projects.

Multiple sources

The projects that could provide as much as 29,000 acre-feet of water include increasing conservation, capturing stormwater, storing excess water in the Seaside aquifer, treating recycled water for agricultural use, treating recycled water for urban use, diverting excess flows from the Salinas river and desalinating intruded groundwater.

“They’ve never been put together like this, but they are all proven methods,” Melton said.

Potentially harmful discharges to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary would be reduced, environmental impacts would be lower due to the need for fewer pipelines, the water would be less expensive, and the carbon footprint would be smaller for the REPOG project than for the desal plant proposed by Cal-Am, according to Melton. Electricity generated by harnessing methane gas at the Marina landfill would power the REPOG desal plant.

At the March 4 Carmel City Council meeting, members said they were impressed with the proposal and asked what the greatest challenges might be.

Getting all the involved entities to cooperate could top the list, but Melton said he believes everyone could strive to work together.

“Do you have the political will needed to push this forward?” councilman Ken Talmage asked.

Melton said support will increase as the project solidifies, which he said will happen as planners prepare to submit it to the California Public Utilities Commission by late 2008 or early 2009. The water supply proposal will be considered as an alternative in the environmental impact report prepared for Cal Am’s desal plant.

“Fundamentally, everyone we’ve talked with is very excited about the project,” Melton said.