

Two water boards vote to merge with settlement agreement

By [Jim Holt](#) - December 13, 2016, 10:04 pm



clwa/ncwd water merger logo.

Water officials moved to create one unifying water agency Tuesday when members of Santa Clarita Valley's oldest water retailer and its water wholesaler entered into a binding settlement agreement towards that end.

All but one of the joint board members voted in favor of seeking legislation that would create one new water agency.

Board members representing the wholesaler Castaic Lake Water agency and retailer Newhall County Water District met at the Rio Vista Water Treatment Plant Tuesday night for a special meeting to discuss

publicly and then endorse an agreement that would meld the two into one new agency.

There was just one item on the agenda of both boards – an agreement that would dissolve all civil litigation between the two agencies and compel them both to create a single new agency.

Four of five NCWD members voted in favor of a merger, all 10 CLWA members voted in favor. NCWD member Lynne Plambeck voted against the agreement.

The agreement itself was framed according to seven basic principles.

The first of the seven defined the purpose of the agreement, as “to settle litigation by agreeing to seek legislation to create a single new successor entity under the terms and conditions of this agreement.”

The two agencies would dissolve all civil litigation between them.

Once that’s done, the two would be governed by law through legislation and then operate as one agency when it comes to managing all aspects of water in the SCV, from water still in the ground to water that’s recycled.

The agreement said they agreed that: “A single entity would build on and lead to greater success in water conservation, groundwater management (including conjunctive management of groundwater and surface water supplies), and future recycled water expansion across the Santa Clarita Valley.”

Before they actually voted on the agreement, directors heard a presentation by Probolsky Research explaining a survey that asked 300 people about the prospect of a new single water agency.

A third of the people surveyed said it should go to voters while 59 percent said the decision should be made by elected officials.

In summing up the message of those 59 percent, NCWD member B.J. Atkins said: “We hired you to do this for us. Thank you very much. I’ll pay my bill.”

NCWD President Maria Gutzeit said the ad-hoc committee received 11 support letters including those from Joe Messina, James Backer and Lois Bauccio.

Three letters of opposition included those from Joan and Ed Dunn, both former members of the NCWD.

Directors heard from a handful of supporters and a handful of those opposed.

“Businesses have always looked to the water agencies to help them grow “ said Lois Bauccio, CEO of the Santa Clarita Valley Chamber of Commerce, urging the combined boards to “eliminate a fractured system “

“This proposal has undergone a year of study,” Bauccio said. “Our local businesses support this measure” she said, noting the chamber represents 1,100 businesses.”

“We are really impressed with the progress you’ve made. A settlement agreement will save ratepayers a significant amount of money,” said Jeannie Duarte, speaking for the Valley Industry Association Santa Clarita and its 400 businesses.

“We support a quick end to litigation,” Duarte said. “We do strongly support the process you embarked on.”

Stacy Fortner asked the combined board: “I don’t know what you guys are afraid of letting the people vote on this.

“My request is that you hold off on this until the recall effort is done,” she said, referring to the announcement Thursday of Joan Dunn’s bid to recall two NCWD board members.

Curtis Wood, general manager of Eternal Valley Memorial Park Mortuary, told board members: “Now you have the responsibility to make the right decision. I believe you guys will represent us well. Cudos for holding many public comment sessions.”

“You are the ones who should make that decision now because that’s what the majority of the people said,” he said.

Erika Kauzlarich-Bird, a realtor born and raised in the Santa Clarita Valley said: “I’ve watched Santa Clarita grow and I am in support of moving forward with this.”

She said that since she “sells Santa Clarita” daily, she can see how a newly formed agency can affect homeowners, and the community.

“It will help with some of the infrastructure that’s needed.”

Dan Masnada called one new agency “a good thing”. Reflecting on SCV history he said several water agencies developed naturally over time according to the communities they represented, noting those days are not these days.

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