

MEDIA RELEASE # 2 (Longer Version)

From: Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District

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Local control, legal viability to be threshold standards in water planning

The Board of Directors of the Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District voted unanimously Dec. 10 to accept a framework of values developed by the community to guide the development and evaluation of options in long term water resource planning.

Phase 1 of an award-winning community engagement process ended when the board voted 5-0 to endorse a framework that listed local control and legal viability as two thresholds that must be met before any option moves to evaluation.

“To get in the room, you have to cross the threshold of the door,” said Jacqueline Debets, a member of the Water Resources Planning Advisory Committee.

“We didn’t use a weighting factor, but unless those two things are there, there’s no point discussing the options,” WRP committee member Bill Thorington said.

Once an option passes the threshold, the evaluation criteria include whether or not it preserves or enhances the Mad River eco-system; provides access to a sufficient and long-term supply of high quality water for multiple purposes; employs water as an asset to benefit the regional economy; provides funding to the district for infrastructure maintenance to decrease the costs to domestic ratepayers; and provides recognizable benefits to the community’s quality of life.

“The ‘or’ is very important,” Thorington said of preserving or enhancing the river, which appears first among the criteria. “Not every option will enhance. Some will preserve. At the very least, we expect not to damage the eco-system.”

The criteria and the 20 questions spread among them are to be applied in such a way that they “allow for adaptation as conditions evolve.”

As approved, each option does not have to meet all the criteria, but all criteria are to be considered by the board.

A 14-person Advisory Committee developed the framework based on significant public input, as well as input from the District’s Municipal Customers. The three-month process included six drafts, deliberations down to single words, and input from a 30-person Citizens’ Study Group and another 190 community members who participated in

public meetings in Arcata, Eureka and McKinleyville. Debets noted that the framework was developed with “an enormous amount of deliberation and care.”

“The framework gives us a way to do analysis against what has been said is important by those in the community who took the time to weigh-in,” Sopoci-Belknap said.

Debets said participants “overwhelmingly expressed” the desire to have the district protect, maintain, and determine uses of its existing water rights.

“No other value had the same weight.”

HBMWD now delivers 15 million gallons a day of treated drinking water to 80,000 customers in Arcata, Blue Lake, Eureka and the community service districts of Fieldbrook-Glendale, Humboldt, Manila and McKinleyville.

At its peak, the district delivered another 40 to 50 million gallons per day of untreated water to two pulp mills operating on the Samoa Peninsula.

The state permits the right to use surface water, but permitted water that is not put to beneficial use could be lost to another.

The board also discussed at length the criteria that any option “must implement actions that are currently legal, or if they require permits, variances or changes to the law, those are likely to be obtained.”

Division 5 rep Aldaron Laird praised the document for focusing on district cost recovery by asking if an option utilizes the existing industrial system infrastructure, generates energy for system use or sale, or contributes to covering costs for infrastructure maintenance upgrades or expansion – any of which might help control customer rates.

“We’re not in any position to build new structures,” he said. “We’ve got to use what we’ve got and we need to get back to what we can afford. Those come right to the top for me.”

“This is a good working tool,” said Division 3 director Barbara Hecathorn. “This isn’t the end, but it’s the beginning of the end, isn’t it?”

“It’s the end of the beginning,” quipped Rupp.

Phase 2: Generate Options - begins January 19 with a daylong workshop at 445 Herrick Ave. in Eureka (follow signs to the Elks Club). The Workshop starts at 9:00 a.m. with check-in between 8:30 a.m. and 9:00 a.m.

The workshop is free and lunch will be provided. Participants must pre-register at www.hbmwd.com and clicking on Water Resource Planning button, or by calling 707-443-5018.

The workshop will give participants a fuller understanding of the issues facing HBMWD and its municipal customers, all of which are nonprofit entities. It's been a difficult year throughout the district as everyone has struggled to deal with water bills that are doubling and tripling in the aftermath of losing two pulp mills that shared between 45% and 80% percent of the district's fixed costs.

Attorneys, engineers, environmental experts and stakeholders will present and answer questions about water rights law surrounding use, sale, and transfer; infrastructure needs and potential impacts if they are not addressed; beneficial uses and possible option categories within those uses; hydrology and how option categories affect the Mad River; and economic development to be gained by selling water locally.

At the end of the day, participants will develop some initial options and identify the assets and constraints surrounding each.

The Citizens' Study Group and general public will build on those options at meetings in February and March.

Phase 3 is set for late spring. The board will announce its long term plans for the district by summer.

"We're supportive of the entire process, in large part because we don't know where it's going," McKinleyville Community Services District director Dennis Mayo said.

Caption for Picture: (Left to right) Bill Thorington, Tera Prucha, Bruce Rupp, Dave Varshock and Carol Rische listen at the Dec. 10 meeting of the Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District. The board unanimously accepted a framework of values developed over the last three months by several hundred stakeholders and citizens. Submitted photo/Carol Harrison

