

For Immediate Release
February 15, 2012
Santa Cruz, California

Contact: Don Lane, Santa Cruz Mayor (831.420.5022) dlane@cityofsantacruz.com
David Terrazas, Santa Cruz City Councilmember (831.212.3889) dterrazas@cityofsantacruz.com

Ordinance proposed for community vote on desalination

Santa Cruz Mayor Don Lane and Santa Cruz City Councilmember David Terrazas, both representatives for the City of Santa Cruz on the SCWD2 Desalination Task Force, announced their plans to bring an ordinance to the February 28 City Council meeting. The ordinance would mandate a vote of the people before proceeding to construction of a local desalination facility while avoiding significant flaws contained in a competing measure.

Lane and Terrazas released the following statement:

There is strong community consensus that the voters should have the opportunity to make the call on how Santa Cruz will address our need for long-term drought protection and the protection of our coastal aquifers. And the community should weigh in on, how we will meet State/Federal mandates to protect endangered fish species with a likely reduced draw of water from local streams.

A flawed ballot measure has been put forward by desal opponents which does not offer a timely opportunity for democratic decision-making to address our community's water needs. Unfortunately, that measure unintentionally would create an expensive delay in community decision making and would lead to greater uncertainty in our water planning process.

This new ordinance, should it pass at the February 28, 2012 City Council meeting, would provide a simpler and more straightforward way to ensure a democratic decision about water and desalination.

This new proposal would provide a fair and timely ballot choice to Santa Cruz City voters by:

- requiring the Santa Cruz City Council to obtain voter approval for the City to participate in the construction of a desalination facility;
- structuring the ordinance to allow for a citizen vote as soon as practicable rather than unnecessarily delaying the people's vote on water issues for an extra year or even more;
- saving the community money in terms of duplicative election costs and in terms of project costs that increase with long delays;
- ensuring that the ballot measure is neutral on the issues, in contrast to the competing ballot measure, which contains questionable assumptions and biased rhetoric;

- ensure the vote comes after completion of the Environmental Impact Report (likely in the first half of 2013).

In anticipation of concerns that a city ordinance could be undone and deny voters their right to weigh in, Lane explained the strength of the ordinance's commitment: "Once adopted, if the City Council ever moved to repeal it, a single voter could file a simple referendum petition and suspend that repeal. That relatively simple filing action would keep the ordinance in place until the people had a chance to decide. The voters would still have the final word."

Terrazas added: "There is strong community consensus for a public vote on this issue and the question will ultimately be going to the voters one way or another. Let's provide this opportunity now – to guide our current decision making and to help shape the substantive discussion and decisions required to meet our long-term water needs."