

Regional

NID Board votes to limit capital plan funding for proposed Centennial Dam to \$2 million a year

By YubaNet - October 10, 2018, 08:46:00 PM

GRASS VALLEY, Calif. October 10, 2018 – About 500 members of the public filled the Grass Valley Vets Hall yesterday evening for a special meeting of the Nevada Irrigation District (NID). On the agenda was a resolution, proposed by the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) to cease, where legally possible, work and spending on the proposed Centennial Dam project on the Bear River until the Raw Water Master Plan (RWMP) is completed. The Board ended up voting 3-2 on a different motion – to limit the expenditures in the capital plan to \$2 million annually.



*NID's Board and staff on stage during the meeting.
Photo YubaNet*

The meeting started with a presentation "Oct 9 NID Resolution Presentation" by SYRCL's Executive Director Melinda Booth explaining why SYRCL and other organizations oppose further spending on Centennial-related acquisitions and studies until the Raw Water Master Plan is completed. NID staff followed with a 49-slide presentation "NID Response to SYRCL" responding to the arguments made by SYRCL. Between legal counsel, engineering and finance staff the rebuttal took most of the time allocated for the meeting until NID's legal counsel proposed to open the floor to comments from the public – with 3 of the 10 points still to be countered/explained.

No time limit on individual speakers, but little time to comment left

The public in attendance was not pleased to hear the meeting would go only until 8:30 pm, leaving less than 45 minutes for comment. Adding to the frustration were technical difficulties with the sound and the projection systems. Nevertheless, people quickly lined up to speak. By setting no time limit for individual speakers instead of the habitual three minutes, the number of speakers was curtailed by people's passion and their obvious desire to be heard by NID's Board. Opponents of the project outnumbered favorable opinions.

A compromise of sorts

With the end of the meeting fast approaching, Director Scott Miller stated he wanted to make a motion, 'a compromise of sorts' that re-prioritizes NID's focus. His motion appeared to set the aggregate spending in the capital plan for the Centennial project at \$2 million a year. Director Nancy Weber seconded the motion "because this is a compromise." The full text of the resolution was not available at publication time. Once the full text is available, we will update this story.

In plain English: NID plans expenditures ahead of adopting their annual budget, with the capital plan as a placeholder for the budget. In 2018, the capital plan allocated \$4 million to Centennial under the Engineering Department. These funds were used for outside studies, in-house staff time and property acquisitions. Miller's motion proposed to freeze that amount at \$2 million, with no possibility of amending, backfilling or increasing the amount.

Update October 10, 2018 at 9:30 PM On August 21, 2018, the Engineering Committee approved the 2019-2023 Capital Budget with \$1,500,000 for 2019 and \$2,000,000 for 2020 through 2023 for Centennial. Scott Miller and Nick Wilcox both are assigned to the Engineering Committee.

Rules, order and decorum not a priority for Board Chair or legal counsel?

Had the meeting followed normal rules, directors would have discussed the motion, heard from the public and then voted on the motion. [See NID's [Board Policy Manual](#) section 5070.3] Neither Chair Will Morebeck or NID's legal counsel appeared to be aware of the policy, instead letting Director Nick Wilcox make a "courtesy" motion to adopt the proposed SYRCL resolution after a vehement request by SYRCL's Policy Director. That motion died for lack of a second, a requirement for any motion to be considered for a vote.

Amidst requests to extend the meeting past 8:30 pm to allow the public standing in line to voice their opinion, the board then proceeded to return to Miller's motion – with no public input. Due to yet more technical difficulties with the projection screens, the full text of the motion was never visible to the public or the media.

The roll call vote on the motion was 3-2 with Nancy Weber, Scott Miller and Nick Wilcox voting Yes, John Drew and Will Morebeck voting No.

The meeting appeared to end at that point, although it was impossible to hear if Chair Morebeck ever formally adjourned the special meeting.

No change really

NID has allocated \$2 million a year through 2023 and regularly increased the amount throughout the fiscal year if the need arose. Miller's motion was reminiscent of the Nevada County BOS' first vote on placing Measure W on the ballot in 2016 – with ballot language that would have only changed the wording, not the meaning of the county's ban on outdoor cultivation. (The BOS eventually adopted a resolution that made the distinction between a Yes and a No vote meaningful.)

The resolution does place restrictions on expenditures related to Centennial, however it can be overturned by another board resolution at any time. However, NID has repeatedly stated their focus is shifting to the Raw Water Master Plan. The district has hired facilitator and a technical consultant firms to guide the two-year process. The final budget for 2019 is expected to be adopted at the next board meeting on October 24, 2018.

SYRCL: Disappointed with NID's 'business as usual'

In a [statement released this afternoon](#), Executive Director Melinda Booth summed up SYRCL's concerns and thoughts about last night's meeting. "This was one of the strangest public meetings I've attended. While I'm pleased for the opportunity to have so many people gather in one place to engage in our community's water future, I was disappointed the NID Board did not provide more time for public comment."

"At NID, it's business as usual — putting the cart before the horse by wasting millions on Centennial Dam even when the state determined the project has no public benefit. We are disappointed NID failed to support SYRCL's common sense approach to complete the raw water master plan first," said Booth.