

Nevada Irrigation District puts brakes on its Raw Water Master Plan update



Liz Kellar
January 23, 2019

[Share \(6\)](#) [Tweet](#) [Comments \(1\)](#) [Email](#) [Print](#) [+](#)



Liz Kellar/lizk@theunion.com

A facilitator moderates a discussion during a Plan for Water workshop in this December photo.

[PREV](#) | 1 of 2 images | [NEXT](#)

The Nevada Irrigation District's board of directors opted on Wednesday to "terminate without prejudice" its \$811,000 contract with consultant group The Kolbe Company and rethink what was to have been a two-year-long update of its Raw Water Master Plan.

The district had hired The Kolbe Company last September in an effort to foster a more collaborative approach to determining the district's water needs for the next 50 years. The discussion has been contentious, in part because the water district's Centennial Reservoir project remains highly controversial.

The Kolbe Group in December hosted two Plan for Water meetings, which were intended to provide the basis for the district's Raw Water Master Plan update. That plan update will not only project the district's future water supply and demand conditions, it will develop alternatives to meet those needs.

In the interim, the water district had tabled discussing guidelines for forming a Community Representative Group for the Raw Master Plan update until its new board — with three new members — was seated in January.

On Wednesday, district staff asked the new board to revisit the decision to hire The Kolbe Group and use its Community Representatives Group process. The staff report offered an alternative process, the American Water Works Association M50 process, which it described as a "tested method for water resource planning for many agencies throughout the state."

The Community Representative Group process used in the [two Plan for Water meetings](#), staff said, is "a unique and somewhat experimental process not yet implemented before by NID."

It was not completely clear what prompted the decision to place the update process back on the agenda, although it was noted the workshop venues were not ideal and the content did not answer everyone's issues.

"The (Raw Water Master Plan update) process was started and developed by the previous board," said update project manager Jim Crowley. "This is an opportunity for the new board to look at an alternative direction."

Crowley noted the Community Representative Group process used by The Kolbe Company brings the public in at very beginning, and requires a high level of commitment both from the agency and the public.

"It's a very time-intensive process," he said.

The process currently being used is costing the district a lot of money, board member Ricki Heck said, advocating for the M50 process with plenty of stakeholder involvement, possibly in the form of town halls in each district.

"I'm not sure if you win if you try to do it easier, quicker, cheaper," said board member Nick Wilcox, adding he feared streamlining the process will lead to accusations of steamrolling the public.

"This board wants to include the public, the community, the stakeholders, to the maximum extent possible," responded Heck.

During public comment, a number of community members urged the board to consider a letter initially submitted last May by the Foothills Water Network. That letter was re-submitted on Tuesday by the network and the South Yuba River Citizens League, stating there was "significant disappointment" with the implementation of the Raw Water Master Plan update process.

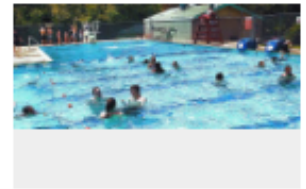
Most important, the letter said, is the need to establish a fully representative stakeholder group at the beginning that helps guide the formation of the process itself.

"Pause and consider how you are involving the public," said Foothills Water Network Coordinator Traci Sheehan.

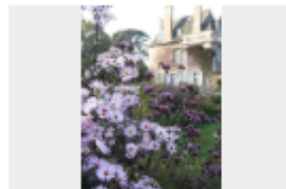
RECOMMENDED STORIES FOR YOU



[Obituary of Albert Karl Revere](#)



[Grass Valley looks to federal funds for Memorial Park pool improvements](#)



[Patti Bess: The Kitchen Garden](#)



[Do you 'Believe?': Paul Emery Presents a musical theater fairy tale](#)

Sheehan lauded the current board for having the conversation now, adding. "What do you want to see in this process? ... Let's press pause and continue this conversation. Get that buy-in (from the public)."

Heck moved to terminate the contract with The Kolbe Group in order to "stop the bleeding" — staff estimated the district already has paid nearly \$140,000 to the consultants. That motion passed on a 4-1 vote with Nick Wilcox voting no. A further motion directed staff to pursue the M50 process and remit the issue to the Water & Hydroelectric Operations Committee, which will set up a stakeholder group to continue the update process.

Directors Chris Bierwagen and Heck serve on that committee, which meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 9 a.m. The meetings are open to the public.

Contact reporter Liz Kellar at 530-477-4236 or by email at lizk@theunion.com.