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FEATURED

## Residents urged to contact officials as water termination deadline approaches

By Jessica Wilkinson Patterson Irrigator  
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Residents of the Diablo Grande community attend a Western Hills Water District Board of Directors special meeting on Saturday at the Diablo Grande Community Center to hear updates on the potential water shut off on June 30th.

Jessica Wilkinson / Patterson Irrigator

Western Hills Water District had a public meeting Saturday to discuss the **termination of water service to the Diablo Grande community** they are currently facing and other viable water source options.

WHWD Board President Mark Kovich said they have had discussions with Patterson Irrigation District on what would have to happen in order to purchase water through them instead of Kern County Water Agency, whom they owe more than \$13.5 million to.

Kovich said the good thing about working with PID would be that they would not have to purchase a minimum amount of water like they do with Kern County Water Agency, because of the State Water Project, and they will sell the district water at market price, only selling what the district uses.

While that is a great long-term option, Kovich said it does come with challenges.

In able to work with PID, they will have to have a physical pipe that connects to PID's facility to the pipe at the Marshall Davis Well.

"It's about a 5,000-foot pipe that we're going to have to put into the ground," he said.

They will also have to get easements from two farmers where the pipe would cut across their farmland. The cost is currently unknown, but he said they will be looking at doing engineering studies, there will be costs associated with environmental approvals, permits and more, so it is not something that will be happening over the next few weeks.

The gameplan is to attempt to come to some sort of agreement with KCWA working toward paying some of the debt owed that previous developers were supposed to be subsidizing and try to keep the water on for several more months while a new source of water is established, Kovich said.

The board president also talked about a new water rate study being conducted that will be presented to the community May 10 and the potential impact it could have financially in order to get money coming in to pay KCWA, build a reserve and do some repairs on crumbling infrastructure to keep the water district running.

Residents may be facing much higher water bills in the short term, but board member Michael Oliver said they have to be realistic about solving the problem.

“Nobody wants to pay more, none of us wants to pay more,” Oliver said. “We didn’t create this issue but the reality is, we’re the only ones who are going to resolve it.”

By keeping the water flowing in the short term, houses will retain their value, and then in the long term as a new water source is established and they are able to bring in a new developer to build out Phase One of the Diablo Grande project, values will only increase.

“We’re going to have to (pay more) to fix the situation in the short term. In the long term, things will get better,” he said.

Kovich also talked about taking the sewer charges off the water bill completely and having it added to the property tax statements instead to ensure the City of Patterson receives their money for providing sewer services to the Diablo Grande community.

The looming water shut off date of June 30th is still a very distinct possibility, but Debbie Antigua with the Diablo Grande Action Committee urged residents to continue reaching out to their elected officials to keep the problem at the forefront of their minds.

As summer months approaching quickly and along with it an increased fire danger, one resident asked about what protection there will be if the water does get shut off.

Kovich said they have talked to fire agencies and they will be leaving one million gallons in the tank in case there is a fire.

Other residents asked about the possibility of trucking water up to the community, but Kovich explained with as much water that is used by the district, it would not be cost effective. The district uses up to a million gallons in two days. Legal counsel also advised that residents can only purchase drinking water for their homes.

## MELLO ROOS DEBT

Another problem WHWD is facing is that former developer World International stopped paying their CFD Mello Roos taxes back in 2017, leaving a huge shortfall of \$31 million of debt that needs to be paid back to the bondholders.

Twenty-two homes are currently on the County Tax Collector's list and if they are sold by the tax collector, the new owners of that property are not legally required to pay the arrearages on that \$31 million debt and it will fall back on the district, Kovich said.

"We have to make sure and stop this," he said. "So my ask of you, of the community, is to petition the county and to ask the county politely, diplomatically, and respectfully to stop this."

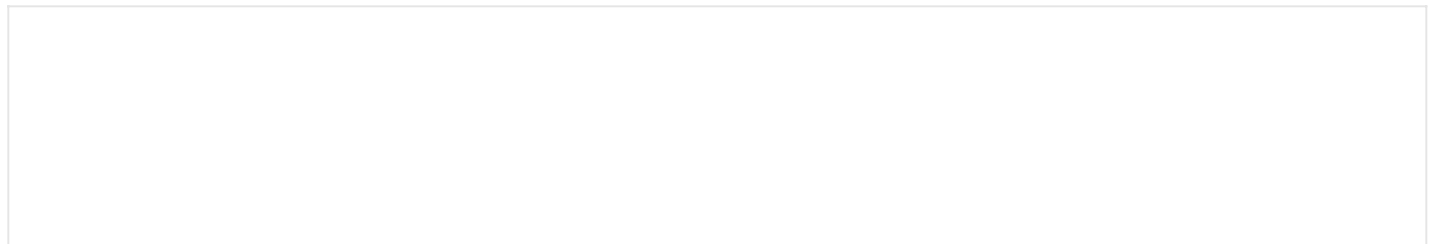
"If this goes forward, the financial burden of the Mello Roos CFD debt will fall squarely on the district, on all of us. Let me be clear, the Western Hills Water District is not owned or shielded by any corporate entity. The district belongs to the people, it belongs to you."

Kovich said they did have meetings scheduled with the county this week to further discuss the matter, but they need the help of the community to also reach out and request the tax sale be delayed because it could have very harmful impacts on the community.

"The bottom line here is to fix our problems, we need development," Kovich said, later adding that no developer will come in until the water and sewer problems are solved.

"We cannot and will not back down. Justice delayed is justice denied, but with your support we will not be denied. But make no mistake, this is not a fight I, or this board, can win alone. We need you. We need your voice. We need your strength. Together we will stand, together we will fight, together we will prevail and together we will stay the course."

MORE INFORMATION





Diablo Grande residents concerned after water service termination notice