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Partial victory on water price hikes

1 message

Bruce Van Allen, SC Desal Alternatives <longinotti@baymoon.com>

Thu, Sep 18, 2014 at 9:53 PM

Reply-To: "Bruce Van Allen, SC Desal Alternatives" <longinotti@baymoon.com>

To: dan@ucsc.edu

Water rates should encourage conservation, not penalize it.

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Dear ,

I've been engaged in civic affairs all my adult life, including four years as City Council member and mayor in the 1980's. That's long enough to know that in politics you seldom get everything that you want. So I'm able to celebrate the progress that our organization has helped to make on the City's proposed water rate increases.

The Water Department is requesting that the City Council approve two water rate increases:

- a temporary two-year drought surcharge
- a permanent 61% across the board increase implemented over a 5 year period

Desal Alternatives does not dispute the need for rate increases to make up lost revenue due to curtailment. And we support the capital improvements that the Water Department wants to fund with the permanent rate increase. However, we wish that the rate increases were structured to encourage conservation. As currently structured, the drought surcharge actually penalizes water conservation. The drought surcharge falls entirely on the fixed portion of the customers bill. This means that customers using moderate amounts of water will pay the same rate increase as customers using a lot more water.

So here's the good news. In a meeting with myself and Rick Longinotti, the Water Director and City Manager acknowledged the importance of structuring water rates to encourage conservation. They have committed to a written timetable for restructuring the current water rate increases. They will bring the restructured rate proposal to the City Council in the spring of 2016. In the meantime, the Water Department will bring a proposal to the Council in spring of 2015 for a revamped water hook-up fee for new construction. This is our opportunity to implement water-neutral growth---a water-demand offset program for new construction.

It will take our public engagement over the next two years to fulfill the opportunity to achieve a water rate structure that will meet the City Manager's goal to "become a top water conservation city in California". Join me at the City Council meeting next Tuesday at 7pm and we'll communicate to the Council that water rates can be an invaluable tool for conservation---if we have the will to design them that way.

-Bruce Van Allen

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