

Grant boosts chances for water in Coombsville

By KERANA TODOROV, Register Staff Writer

A proposed recycled water system for the North Bay got a \$200,000 boost this week. The federal grant money is a step towards solving groundwater problems in places like Coombsville, where wells have been running dry.

The \$200,000 for the North Bay Water Reuse Authority will allow the agency to apply up to \$25 million in federal funds toward the construction of recycled water projects in Marin, Sonoma and Napa counties. The Napa Sanitation District is one member of the authority and is working to bring recycled water to the Milliken-Sarco-Tulocay watershed in thirsty Coombsville.

“This little bit of funding is what starts the process,” explained Ginger Bryant, a consultant with Bryant and Associates of Sacramento, a lobbyist for the authority. “Without that, we couldn’t get the (larger sum of) money.”

“I think it shows their commitment to the project,” said Napa County Supervisor Keith Caldwell, referring to federal officials. Caldwell’s district includes Coombsville, which has a groundwater problem forcing some residents to dig deeper wells and others to buy potable water and have it trucked to their homes.

The authority is also seeking state and local funding.

Napa County first proposed a reclaimed water pipeline through Coombsville, to be paid for by property owners. But opposition from residents, including many long-time owners and retirees on limited incomes, prompted the county and Napa Sanitation District to consider a scaled-down project.

The \$13 million project being studied now would create about 5.5 miles of recycled water pipes, running from the Napa Sanitation District plant near Napa Valley College to the Napa Valley Country Club on Hagen Road. The 8-to-24 inch pipe would also carry recycled water to a yet-to-be determined number of major water users, including vineyard properties along the way.

Scott Zion, president of the Napa Valley Country Club, said the club wants a more reliable source of water. The club relies on one well to irrigate its older, original front nine holes, and on rainfall stored in ponds to water the newest nine holes.

“We have always said that we would be willing to pay” a fair share for the pipeline, Zion said. “The country club wouldn’t be viable without the golf course.”

Suzanne von Rosenberg, acting president of Groundwater Under Local Protection, or GULP, a group of residents in Coombsville, said Coombsville cannot solve its water shortage problem — which includes availability of potable water — without recycled water for irrigation and landscaping, she said. “Recycled water is an absolute must,” she said.

The authority’s members — the Napa Sanitation District, the Sonoma County Water Agency, Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District, Novato Sanitary District, and the Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District — are considering a second series of projects which would cost as much as \$200 million. One such project includes installing pipes in Carneros, which also has groundwater supply problems.

Napa Valley Register Copyright © 2009