

LHE Drinking Water Project: History, Status, Issues, Options

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LHPUSD Special Board Meeting

Outline

- About this meeting: why are we here?
- Project summary
- History of the project
- Project status summary
- Current events
- Issues to discuss
- Options to ponder
- What happens next?

About This Meeting

- **Purpose:** to alert the community and Board to recent events and issues that may delay the start of construction, seek consensus and direction as to how to proceed—a “go-ahead” plan for the project
- **Nature:** a “study session”, no action on agenda
- **Outcome:** a “sense of the Board” as to a general approach; also, “to-do” items for Tim and Mark (others?) in preparation for further consideration

Project Summary

- We'll pump potable water from Cuesta La Honda:
 - Uphill from Apple Jack's
 - Under Hwy 84
 - Up to a (new) pump house/shed on Sears Ranch Road
 - Onto LHE property, into a connection with the drinking water distribution system
- No provision for fire hydrant(s), sprinklers
- LHPUSD responsible for construction costs.
Funds (~\$400K) come from State bond program.
(We pay maintenance, too)
- *Note: Cuesta water will not be used for irrigation*

History of the Project

- LHE has been without potable water for years, due to fecal coliform contamination from cow pastures
- In October 2002 a Water Agreement was signed between Cuesta La Honda, San Mateo County, LHPUSD allowing Cuesta drinking water to go to LHE. We get water that had been allocated to three houses condemned after El Nino, pay the standard Cuesta rate
- State Water Resources Control Board also had to approve the diversion, due to SGW adjudication

Project Status Summary

- Plans already approved by SMC Dept. of Health Services
- LHPUSD granted exemption of zoning reviews
- Plans and permits under review by:
 - County Building Department (for “encroachment”, plumbing, electrical)
 - CalTrans (for “jack and bore” under Hwy 84)
- Pipe, other materials ordered; subcontractor scheduled
- Groundbreaking scheduled for mid-January
- Construction likely to start January, take about six months
- Meanwhile, the kids drink bottled water; fountains are capped; sink water is sterilized; fields are bare

Current Events (1)

- Should we help the neighbors? Add a hydrant at LHE?
 - Week of 12/7: La Honda newsgroup exchanges suggest water project should be expanded (a) to help local residents get access to fire-fighting water, and/or (b) to supply a hydrant at the school
 - One comment suggests that use of a 4” pipe should be “illegal”. Another poster asks, “How does the school get away with it?”
 - 12/10: MG responds “...as far as I know no one has suggested that the current supply of water, which (while now considered undrinkable due to unacceptable contamination levels) will continue to be available at the school, is not adequate for fire suppression.”

Current Events (2)

- Fire Department is heard from
 - 12/10: Fire Chief Larry Whitney calls MG with details concerning lack of fire suppression support at LHE, suggests that serious consideration should be given to upgrading current water project to provide adequate water for fire fighting at LHE, putting one or more hydrants on Sears Ranch Rd, and putting fire sprinklers at the Fire House
 - 12/11: LW calls MG to say he is sending letter to County Fire Marshal Jim Rust, detailing situation as described above and suggesting that while this project does not appear to have a need for County Fire approval, it may not be prudent to construct such a publicly funded project and not make provisions for improved fire protection

Current Events (3)

- Activities on the LHPUSD side
 - 12/9: Board passes resolution exempting project from 4-month delay for zoning review
 - 12/10: Before and after talk with LW, MG posts notes to La Honda newsgroup responding to comments
 - 12/10: MG, TB consult on new fire-related issues, developments
 - 12/11: Arrangements for Special Meeting begin
 - 12/13: TB contacts engineer, others to gather expert info
 - 12/15: Special Meeting announced
 - 12/17: MG, TB meet with fire officials
 - 12/17: MG, TB meet with water engineer
 - 12/18: Special Meeting

Issues to Discuss

- Should the drinking water project and the fire suppression issues be coupled?
- Could we afford to spend extra money early in 2005 to augment the water project?
- Could we accept private monies to offset the costs of increasing capacity, or to add one or more hydrants?
- Does the current “water agreement” allow use for fire suppression at LHE? How about by private parties? Would the Guild, other parties agree to such an arrangement, contest it, or even seek legal redress?
- How much delay are we willing to endure?

Options to Ponder (1)

- Proceed with drinking water project as planned, if County Fire or other entity does not attempt to block it or try to force modifications*
- Decouple the water project from the issue of fire suppression at LHE
 - This approach doesn't mean fire suppression (including at other campuses) couldn't be pursued as a priority
 - One possibility: store LHE's well water in tanks, hook to pump and hydrant for emergency fire suppression

*Informal 12/17 assurances indicate SMC Fire has no plans to exert official influence

Options to Ponder (2)

- Upgrade “drinking water” system to supply all needed water for adequate LHE fire suppression
- Cost: tens of thousands of dollars, maybe *much* more
- Delays: months, perhaps years
- Risks of delay
 - Possible loss of state funding
 - Possible withdrawal by water engineer
 - Hampered LHE recruiting efforts
 - Meanwhile the kids would have no drinking water *and* would still be in proximity of bad water!

Options to Ponder (3)

- Attempt minimal “common sense” upgrade to water project with small impact on cost and schedule
- Could mean no change except laying 6” pipe (not 4”) in the trench, adding other stuff later (initial study indicates this approach not promising)
- Alternative: put hydrant in locked pump house already planned along Sears Ranch Road
- *Note: might be possible to supply fire hydrants from LHE well water (not potable!) stored in tanks*

What Happens Next?

- Board can do “nothing”—let project go forward
 - Construction already authorized to proceed
 - Study, informal talks about options can proceed
 - Groundbreaking can go ahead (1/15/05?)
 - Regular Board meeting set for 1/20/05
 - Special Meeting could be called pre-1/20 to report, consider authorizing design changes, additional \$
- Board can halt construction pending study
 - Would also probably entail another Special Meeting, the sooner the better but mid-January at the latest
 - Might also want to withdraw pending permit apps

Backup Slides

Quick Analysis of the 4-Inch to 6-Inch Pipe Upgrade Option*

- Would require:
 - Larger pump, heavier wiring, conduit(?)
 - Different flow meters, various fittings
 - Changing the Hwy 84 “jack and bore” to use 8” casing
 - New engineering calculations, drawings
 - At least \$1.00/foot more for 3,300 feet pipe (plus re-stock charge)
 - New permits for plumbing, electrical, jack and bore
 - Delays of several months (best guess) before start
- Approximate minimum cost: \$22K

*Based on 12/17 discussion with Glen Holdren, LHE’s water engineer

MG's 12/10 Postings to La Honda NewsGroup (1-1:44 a.m.)

- “As it happens, we discussed the status La Honda Elementary School water project again tonight (in the Superintendent's report, properly agendized), and the plans for the project were carefully laid out on the back table for anyone to peruse.

Of course they are also available for inspection at District headquarters (Russell Administrative Center in Pescadero, 879-0286).

WRT fire suppression at the school and whether a 4" pipe should be "illegal": Please remember we are trying to bring *drinking water* to the children at the school! The school has been there for decades without this additional water supply, and as far as I know no one has suggested that the current supply of water, which (while now considered undrinkable due to unacceptable contamination levels) will continue to be available at the school, is not adequate for fire suppression.”

MG's 12/10 Posting to La Honda NewsGroup (2-11:16 a.m.)

- "I've followed this up this morning by talking with a couple of folks knowledgeable about fire protection issues at the school. I am going to suggest to the Superintendent that we look into the adequacy of current measures and see if it makes sense to think about trying to change the piping plan to improve our protections.

Two notes:

1. As I've noted here before, the deal to bring Cuesta water to the school is a complicated, multi-party matter that only got signed through substantial sacrifice, generosity, and elbow grease. It may not be practical to make any changes.

2. Unfortunately I will not be able to participate in a long, multi-thread, multi-group discussion of the idea. I will try to get some good info, talk to key parties, and let folks on this list know of any progress in a timely way.

We are currently scheduled to break ground in mid-January, after several years without potable water at the school. Construction is expected to take about six months. I personally will be very reluctant to delay the project further. "