

Nevada Irrigation District OKs \$811K to pay consultant



Liz Kellar
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The Nevada Irrigation District approved an \$811,000 contract to push forward with revamping its Raw Water Master Plan, despite vocal opposition to the expenditure from community members in attendance at Thursday's board of directors meeting.

At issue is the hiring of a consultant to facilitate a two-year process for the update even though, according to opponents of the plan, the water district does not have the necessary current data on its consumers' water usage.

The Raw Water Master Plan is intended to project future water supply and demand conditions and develop alternatives to meet those needs for the next 50 years. The decision to update the plan has come in the midst of a contentious debate over the district's proposal to build the Centennial Dam on the Bear River between the Combie and Rollins reservoirs.

The Raw Water Master Plan had not been updated since 2011, General Manager Rem Scherzinger noted in his staff report. He added the new update process will include a more extensive public input and participation component. But the decision to issue a Request for Proposals and then select a consultant — The Kolbe Company — without public input drew heated criticism at Thursday's board meeting.

Director Nancy Weber, the lone dissenting voice on the water district board's 4-1 vote, noted the community is sharply divided over the need for the new dam and that no needs assessment was done.

"We have built antagonism," she said. "I want to build trust. I would like to see the community unite."

Director Nick Wilcox, who called himself a "water nerd," added that he wanted to see "a set of facts we can all agree on."

Several of those in attendance questioned whether that would be possible.

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Melinda Booth of the South Yuba River Citizens League commented that the district needed to take into account new science and new data on climate change, for example.

"We need to have trust in the data," echoed Traci Sheehan of Foothills Water Network, adding that technical experts from outside the water district should be included.

Others in the audience continued to press for a needs assessment, and to ask about the selection process for the advisory committee.

Weber also expressed concerns about the process by which the consultant was selected, commenting that the board should have been involved.

"This (facilitation) model has a top-down structure, it will not build trust," she said, advocating tabling the contract until after a new board is elected in November. "This is a pathway to a lack of success and I think we need to go back to the beginning and figure out where we're going from here."

During public comment, Peter Van Zant agreed with Weber, saying the inclusion of stakeholders is a vital part of the process. Challenged by board member Scott Miller as to who the stakeholders should be, Van Zant named agricultural groups, the cities and communities such as Lake Wildwood.

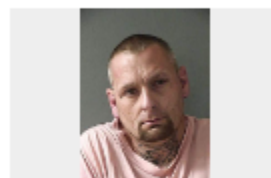
"We have put a lot of effort in talking to you and arguing with you," Van Zant said of the audience members who attend every board meeting. "These people are the stakeholders."

Van Zant went on to warn the board that if those stakeholders are not included up front in the update process, the \$811,000 contract would be a waste of money.

Wilcox, Miller and fellow directors Will Morebeck and John Drew voted to approve the contract, while Weber voted no. The initial phase of the contract, which is slated to run through the end of the year, will include a kick-off meeting, creation of a communications plan, formation of the advisory committee and 12 community meetings.

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