

Syd Brown: NID's sham of a 'special meeting'

Syd Brown
Other Voices

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On Oct. 9, I had a memorable theater experience. I was reminded of the shocking shredding of the recently-auctioned Banksy art piece that self-destructed after the closing of the sale.

NID hosted a special board meeting at the capacious Grass Valley Veterans Memorial Building, ostensibly to take action on two items regarding our community's water future. Ineffectively facilitated/moderated by NID-contracted counsel Andrew McClure, the meeting failed to build the bridge of trust that NID claims to desire.

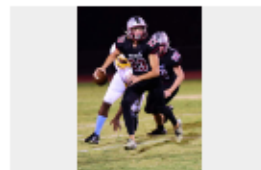
The agenda consisted of only two items — consideration of a South Yuba River Citizens League-sponsored "Resolution1" to cease expenditures and activities related to the Centennial water storage project until the completion and acceptance of the new NID raw water master plan, and a "Resolution2" to suspend "Resolution3" 2014-43.

Back in August 2014, the NID Board of Directors unanimously passed Resolution 2014-43 after a closed session and with no public input. Resolution 2014-43 authorized the "application for water rights for diversion, storage and use of water of the Bear River." Thus began the NID quest for construction of the Centennial Dam.

“I wish NID the best, but the meeting did not demonstrate that NID is giving us their best.

On Tuesday, neither of the publicly noticed resolutions passed. After a 30-minute presentation by Melinda Booth, SYRCL's executive director, NID responded with a mind-numbing parade of staff-led presentations with text-dense slides purporting to address and rebut SYRCL's criticisms. The NID show dragged on for over an hour, addressing only the first seven of SYRCL's 10-point list of supporting evidences for the requested Centennial "pause."

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Director Scott Miller then interrupted the in-progress staff report and offered up a brand new third resolution, in the "spirit of compromise" which derailed any decorum or order for the meeting.

As the board of directors' decorative blue and white table skirts sagged and eventually fell to the floor, the third resolution eventually passed by a split vote of the current NID board. I have yet to obtain a copy of this new resolution — NID staff attempts to publicly display the language of the new resolution were largely unsuccessful, and there was no substantive board discussion, nor opportunity for public comment.

In fact, after advising the audience members at the beginning of the meeting that they would not be held to the typical three-minute limit for public comments, after NID's lengthy and off the target staff presentations, Mr. McClure informed us that we had to vacate the hall by 8:30 p.m. Two lines of energized community members urgently crowded to the two microphones, to ask questions and submit opinions, only to be abruptly dismissed, as the confusion of actions, order of commentary, resolution status ("courtesy motions," followed by lack of a second) and breakdown of meeting protocols soon generated an atmosphere of anger and betrayal.

Shouts erupted, police presence came to the fore, and cries to extend the meeting, were ignored.

Clearly, if NID was trying to educate the community, clear up misunderstandings, and justify their actions to further the construction of Centennial Dam over the last four years, they failed miserably that night. The choice to squander community interest and goodwill with a sham of a special meeting was ill-advised.

NID now has to deal with a growing hostile and betrayed public as it shifts gears from having Centennial front and center to the newly announced and funded Raw Water Master Plan. The new plan no doubt will address many questions that should have been informing NID's actions all along — how much water is required for NID customers? How much water is available? How can the NID water supply be secured in light of future uncertainties of drought, rainfall, snowpack and climate change?

NID says the Raw Water Master Plan will be a 24-month process, informed and supported by substantive community and public inputs. After Tuesday night's debacle, I wonder what brave souls will volunteer their time and expertise and energies to advance this important endeavor. While many have noted that Centennial was very much placing the cart (dam project) in front of the horse (demonstrated need and fiscal feasibility), the Raw Water Master Plan may be a valid attempt to remedy that unfortunate order.

I am an optimist. But I am not a fool.

Tuesday night's theater performance gave me chills of premonition, and not in a good way. I wish NID the best, but the meeting did not demonstrate that NID is giving us their best.

Syd Brown lives in Nevada City.

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