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## Area elected officials back anti-desal project letter

Call for Coastal Commission to reject Cal Am desal permit bid



More than two dozen area elected officials signed on to a letter to the Coastal Commission calling for denial of the California American Water desalination project. (Jim Johnson — Monterey Herald)

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MONTEREY — Touting a shift in local politics and a preferable alternative, more than two dozen area elected officials signed on to a letter to the Coastal Commission calling for denial of the California American Water desalination project.

At a Public Water Now rally at Colton Hall in Monterey Monday morning that drew several dozen attendees, more than a dozen of those officials blasted what they called Cal Am's expensive and environmentally damaging desal project. They said the Monterey Peninsula now has a viable and superior alternative in the proposed Pure Water Monterey recycled water expansion project.

The letter, sent ahead of an anticipated Nov. 14 Coastal Commission meeting in Half Moon Bay to consider a coastal development permit for the desal project, was signed by four area mayors, one county supervisor, 10 city council members, and several water and school board representatives.



A Public Water Now rally at Colton Hall in Monterey Monday morning drew several dozen attendees. (Jim Johnson — Monterey Herald)

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Public Water Now Managing Director Melodie Chrislock pointed out how area political winds had changed after the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District report arguing the recycled water project could provide enough water for the Peninsula without desal to address the Carmel River cutback order and meet local demand at least until 2043 and maybe longer.

“This could never have happened five years ago,” Chrislock said, noting that “most elected officials” used to back Cal Am’s desal project as the only realistic solution, but no more.

Supervisor Jane Parker, who signed the letter, said the area simply didn’t need the “divisive, damaging, expensive, unjust” Cal Am desal project when a more “affordable, environmentally sustainable” alternative is available in Pure Water Monterey expansion.

“We need a solution that makes things better,” Parker said, “not worse.”

A representative spoke for State Assemblyman Mark Stone, whose name was not on the letter but whose quote, “Who needs desal,” was emblazoned on a sign at the rally.

Monterey Mayor Clyde Roberson, Seaside Mayor Ian Oglesby, Del Rey Oaks Mayor Alison Kerr and Marina Mayor Bruce Delgado all signed the letter and spoke at the rally. Longtime Peninsula water activist and water management district board member George Riley also spoke, praising those who attended the rally and urging them to “stay active” because “it’s not over yet.”

Others who signed the letter included Pacific Grove Councilwoman Jenny McAdams, Seaside Councilmen Jon Wizard, Jason Campbell and David Pacheco, Monterey Councilmen Alan Haffa and Tyller Williamson, Marina Council members Gail Morton, Lisa Berkley, and Adam Urrutia, and Carmel Councilman Jeff Baron.

Alvin Edwards, a Peninsula Water Management District board member, also signed the letter. He urged those at the rally to attend the district’s special Nov. 12 meeting regarding a feasibility analysis of a potential public buyout of Cal Am’s local water system.

Next month is expected to be a whirlwind of water-related activity, including the anticipated Nov. 7 release of the Pure Water Monterey expansion environmental review document, and the expected start of potable water production by the core recycled water project.

All five members of the Marina Coast Water District board signed on to the letter, as did Monterey Peninsula Unified School District board member and county supervisorial candidate Wendy Root Askew, along with fellow school board members Alana Myles and Rosalyn Green.

Organizations that had previously signed on to the desal project settlement agreement, including Landwatch and the Planning and Conservation League, have also sent letters to the Coastal Commission opposing the Cal Am desal project in favor of the proposed Pure Water Monterey expansion.

In response to the local elected officials' letter, Cal Am spokeswoman Catherine Stedman reiterated the company's argument that an "in-depth, objective, scientific analysis" of what is required to solve the Peninsula's water issues has already been conducted and the state Public Utilities Commission. It found that a desal project is needed to provide enough water to address the river cutback order and to address future demand, that the Pure Water Monterey expansion wouldn't be adequate.

Stedman said company officials responded to the water management district's supply and demand report by saying its conclusions have "no relevance" in determining facilities needed on the Peninsula to provide a "long-term, drought-proof, adequate water supply." They said it relied on faulty assumptions to elevate existing and projected supplies and ignored water supply constraints while improperly decreasing projected demand.

The CPUC approved Cal Am's 6.4 million-gallon per day desal project as part of a 14,000 acre-foot per year new Peninsula water supply portfolio, including a 3,500 acre-foot Pure Water Monterey project, to replace the river pumping. But the water district report found that the Peninsula could get by with thousands of acre-feet per year less from a new water supply due to lower current and projected future usage, making it possible to replace desal with recycled water expansion.

According to the water management district, the \$329 million desal project would cost local customers \$1.2 billion over 30 years while the \$126 million Pure Water Monterey project would cost local customers about \$190 million, not including the \$35 million expansion.

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