



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Inter-Departmental Correspondence
Board of Supervisors



Date: November 17, 2014
Board Meeting Date: January 13, 2015
Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: Supervisor Don Horsley

Subject: Introduction of a drought assistance program for residents who have lost their primary source of domestic water

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a Resolution authorizing the Environmental Health and Planning and Building departments to expedite permit processes and waive permit fees in connection with the construction of a replacement domestic well and authorizing the County Manager to make appropriate year-end adjustments to such departments' budgets to offset revenues lost as a result of the fees waived.

BACKGROUND:

In January 2014, Governor Jerry Brown declared a Drought State of Emergency for the State of California. As the drought continues to impact local domestic water sources, my office has been notified of a growing number of residents who have lost their primary source of water.

To date, approximately 30 single family dwellings on the Coastsides have experienced a failure of their domestic water sources (such as local wells, streams, and creeks) as a direct result of the drought. To the best of our knowledge, these residents are currently paying to have water hauled to their homes for basic daily needs. Due to the high demand for and scarcity of certified water haulers, San Mateo County Coastsides residents are becoming unable to access or afford water hauling services. As a result, many of these residents may require a replacement domestic well if the drought continues.

Unlike cities and communities on the San Mateo County Bayside, a vast majority of the Coastsides does not have access to Hetch Hetchy water. Additionally, many Coastsides residents rely on their own ground or surface water systems or are members of small water systems dependent on wells, streams or creeks. Reliance on these local sources

for domestic water makes this population particularly vulnerable to natural disaster such as droughts.

County records show that as of September 17, 2014, two permit applications have been filed and approved for the construction of replacement domestic wells. Both projects serve single family dwellings on the Coastsides. The water sources for several more homes have been reported as being at a critical level, with failure imminent under continued drought.

DISCUSSION:

I request that the County expedite permit processes for drilling replacement domestic wells to assist residents who have received an Environmental Health determination that their dwelling's primary source of water has failed due to the drought. In addition to expediting the permit processes, it is requested that the County waive all County permit fees associated with the drilling of replacement domestic wells.

Planning has determined that if a dwelling is supported by a domestic ground or surface water system and the domestic ground or surface water system has been impacted by the drought, the drilling of a replacement domestic well qualifies for a Coastal Development Exemption (CDX) as maintenance of an existing utility. The amount of water extracted by the replacement domestic well should not exceed the amount extracted by the previous domestic water system. By issuing a CDX instead of a Coastal Development Permit (CDP), the permit may be issued over the counter. This expedited permitting process will allow residents to drill replacement domestic wells in a more efficient manner. The cost of a CDX is \$287.00 compared to \$3,489.00 for a CDP.

In addition to the CDX, applicants must obtain three permits from Environmental Health for the different stages of drilling a well and evaluation of the well and water to ensure public health requirements are met. Environmental Health's permits include a well drilling permit (\$1,262.00), certification of quantity (\$1,279.00) and permit to operate a domestic well (water quality and any associated treatment processes) (\$1,406.00) for a total of \$3,947.00 which includes the costs associated with extensive staff time. Additionally, if a failed well must be properly destroyed, there are additional permit and inspection fees totaling \$639.00. Environmental Health has also agreed to expedite their permitting process to ensure applicants can drill replacement domestic wells and have the wells certified as a safe domestic source in a timely manner.

Waiving of Permit Fees

To ensure that all replacement domestic wells meet health and safety standards and all relevant LCP policies, I request that the County waive all permit fees associated with the drilling of a replacement domestic well and the proper destruction of the failed well, if destruction is required by Environmental Health. To qualify for the waiver, an applicant must provide documentation that they are drilling a replacement domestic well for a residential dwelling that was previously supported by a domestic water system that has failed due to the drought. Additionally, the amount of water extracted by the

replacement well should not exceed the amount extracted by the previous domestic water system.

In order to ensure that the County can assist residents who have been impacted by the drought, the Director of Environmental Health shall have the authority to determine whether a domestic water source has failed due to the drought and, if so, the Planning and Building and Environmental Health Department fees otherwise required for replacement of the domestic water sources shall be waived. The Director of Environmental Health shall also have the authority to determine whether a failed well should be properly destroyed or used to supplement the new well and, if removal is warranted, then the fees associated with the proper destruction of the well shall also be waived.

When the Director of Environmental Health determines that the drought is no longer impacting local water sources, the fee waiver program shall be closed. At that time, the directors of Environmental Health and Planning and Building will inform the Board of Supervisors in writing of the number of permits issued and the cost each department incurred for waiving permit fees. Per the attached resolution, until such time as the Director of Environmental Health determines that the drought is no longer impacting local water sources, the County Manager will be directed and authorized to make appropriate year-end fund balance adjustments for both the Planning and Building and Environmental Health departments so that such departments will be made whole for their waiver of the aforementioned fees.

The Resolution has been reviewed and approved by County Counsel as to form.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Fiscal Impact is dependent on the number of permits issued, and fees waived, for replacement domestic wells. The total number of permits issued will be reported to the Board at the close of the program.