

Viewpoint: Lay the desalination facts on the table

Stephen Figler

Fiscally responsible government in Cambria should be able and willing to provide answers to the questions listed below, given the amount of time in years, energy and public funding that has been focused on the Cambria Community Services District's investigations into desalination to solve our town's water concerns.

To say (as CCSD board and staff have numerous times) that no decision has been made about a desalination facility is to evade the main point. No decision should be made until potential costs for a project have been generally or specifically determined and the public is informed of them.

I have asked the CCSD board at a monthly public meeting for the answers to the questions below and also sent registered letters listing the questions to General Manager Tammy Rudock and Board President/ Chairman Greg Sanders. I have had no response in over several weeks, which is the reason for this article.

The citizens of Cambria have a right to be given these figures or estimates. There is widespread concern in Cambria regarding water alternatives, particularly desalination, so that citizens should not be told to "go look it up" in a long and complicated document. The job of the CCSD is not only to make decisions, but to actively inform the public of the basis, financial and otherwise, of these decisions.

The questions that we need answered publicly and directly are as follows:

- (1) The dollar amount of funding set aside by (a) any agency of the State of California or (b) the federal government toward the cost of building a desalination plant for Cambria.
 - (2) How certain is Cambria of actually receiving these funds? In other words, is the money designated and set aside for Cambria, or is it contingent in any way?
 - (3) What portion of these funds will be available when the desalination facility is (a) begun and (b) completed?
 - (4) Will such funds solely be designated for a desalination plant, or can they be applied to an alternate water production or capture facility?
 - (5) What is the current cost estimate of a desalination facility for the community of Cambria? If this is not known, what are the lowest and highest estimated costs of construction? If for some reason the CCSD does not have this information, (a) when did the CCSD last obtain a construction price for a desalination facility and (b) what was that price?
 - (6) If there is a difference between government funding of a desalination facility and total cost, how does the CCSD plan to fund it?
 - (7) What would be the annual maintenance cost of a desalination facility?
 - (8) What would be the annual operating expense for a desalination facility if the facility were to be in operation for one-third (four months) of a year (a) in total and (b) per unit of water?
 - (9) What would be the cost estimates of constructing any alternative to a desalination facility that the CCSD has investigated for providing Cambria with sufficient water during a four-month drought?
 - (10) What would be the approximate maintenance cost(s) of any alternative to a desalination facility that the CCSD has investigated?
 - (11) What would be the operating cost of any alternative to a desalination plant that the CCSD has investigated?
- I expect that the CCSD as a matter of fiscal responsibility has been diligent in acquiring these figures and is ready and willing to provide them. If for some reason the CCSD does not have answers to each question, the CCSD board and staff should provide in a document to CCSD rate payers (a) answers to the questions for which they have figures and (b) state so in instances where they do not have figures and why that is the case. I'm sure everyone in town would like to be informed.

Steve Figler is a Cambria resident.

Editor's note: CCSD's desalination information page is online at <http://bit.ly/cdesal>.