

Viewpoint: How do you value Cambria? - or, Value and values by Jeff Hellman

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It's an old story. It's happened many times along the California Coast. There is a stunningly beautiful, small, quaint, isolated coastal village. It's quiet and peaceful. A few generations ago that was Carmel, Monterey, Santa Cruz, Laguna Beach, Bolinas, Oceanside — and many other coastal communities. Now those former islands of paradise suffer overcrowding, gridlock, congestion, crime, filth and all of the evils that accompany “development.” These natural crown jewels of creation have been decimated, defaced and degraded. No one will ever again get to experience the profound untouched natural beauty of these places of divine beauty. The natural ecosystems with the accompanying flora and fauna are gone and gone for all eternity.

Now those same “development” forces are at work in Cambria. Under the guise of a “water shortage” the development boosters are pushing for a desalination plant. And who are the biggest boosters? Why, of course, developers, speculators, the banking industry and business groups. For example, one group that is pushing very, very hard is the lot owners association known as UNLOC (United Lot Owners of Cambria). And why? Imagine buying a lot for say, \$15,000 or \$30,000. If it gets a water meter it instantly becomes worth \$300,000. That is a nice profit, or at least a noteworthy wealth enhancement. A thousand meters means an instant \$250 million profit. What is your definition of speculation?

It is the ratepayers who will eventually underwrite this wealth-enhancing endeavor. We have already spent millions on lobbyists, lawyers and consultants for a project that is questionable at best and immoral at worst. We still do not know, for absolutely sure, that we will even get funding for the project from the Federal government thru the Army Corp of Engineers. And don't forget the legacy of so very many Army Corp's projects: ecological disaster.

The usual deception: A government project typically cost two to three time the original estimates. We may be on the hook to finance a \$15-30 million bond issue. And the maintenance for a desalination plant is monstrously high. The electricity, the membranes for reverse osmosis, the labor, the infrastructure are not free. Invariably, our water rates will more than double. This is why so many California communities that built desalination plants are shutting them down. Imagine \$200, \$400 and even higher water bills.

For those worried about a water shortage, there are numerous alternatives available. And for those for whom fire safety is an issue, desalination will not help. On that front, the best system for fire fighting is a reservoir. But the big money people will stop at nothing for the big bucks.

Jeff Hellman is a resident of Cambria.

The Cambria Community Services District has a [desalination web page](#)