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Fallbrook and Rainbow Water District Leaders Take Part in LAFCO Committee's First Meeting on Detachment Proposals

SAN DIEGO, CA – Leaders from the Fallbrook and Rainbow water districts participated in this week's initial meeting of a committee that will advise the San Diego County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) on the two districts' desire to detach from the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) and join a nearby water district where they can purchase water at a big savings to ratepayers.

"This was a good, productive first meeting," said Jack Bebee, General Manager of the Fallbrook Public Utility District (FPUD) of Monday's virtual online discussion. "Through the guidance of LAFCO staff, a clear path was established about how we get from point A to point B when the LAFCO board votes on our proposals next year."

Among other things, LAFCO staff indicated that, based on their initial assessment, the environmental review process should be fairly straightforward.

"We agree with their initial assessment that completing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) does not appear appropriate in this case," said Bebee. "We aren't making any physical changes to the environment and will be receiving the same water from the same pipeline. The California Environmental Quality Act does not require an EIR under the circumstances presented."

Prompted by rising water costs from the SDCWA and the fact that the districts do not need SDCWA facilities, FPUD and the Rainbow Municipal Water District (RMWD) are seeking to leave the SDCWA and instead purchase their water from the Eastern Municipal Water District (EMWD) in Riverside County. By joining EMWD, the two districts estimate they could save ratepayers between \$8-10 million a year collectively. Right now, SDCWA charges its member districts over \$1,700 per acre-foot for water. By contrast, EMWD would charge FPUD and RMWD only around \$1,200 per acre-foot. A significant number of ratepayers in the districts are agricultural users for whom the price of water is critical to the viability of their businesses.

At next month's meeting, the committee will take up two important issues – cost allocation and water reliability.

"We've analyzed both of these issues," said Tom Kennedy, General Manager of Rainbow Municipal District (RMWD). "And the detailed technical analysis concluded that our leaving the SDCWA would

have only a miniscule financial impact on the remaining ratepayers – just pennies a month – and will not increase reliance on the Bay-Delta.”

“We look forward to sharing the results of our analysis with the committee and hearing from the SDCWA about the specific concerns they have,” said Kennedy.

In March, both FPUD and RMWD submitted their detachment applications to LAFCO, which is comprised of local elected and appointed officials and is responsible for overseeing the establishment, expansion, and boundary changes of cities and special districts, including water districts.

Kennedy says FPUD and RMWD have become “donor districts” in which they pay for SDCWA infrastructure and facilities that serve agencies to the south, but don’t receive the same benefit from them.

“Due to our unique location in North County, we can serve our customers without using SDCWA’s pipelines and other infrastructure, so subsidizing those facilities at the expense of our customers should not continue,” said Kennedy.

The 10-person committee, which was formed by LAFCO last month, includes representatives from the County of San Diego, San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego County Water Authority, as well as the two districts seeking detachment, the Fallbrook Public Utility District (FPUD) and the Rainbow Municipal Water District (RMWD).

LAFCO is expected to vote on the matter sometime next year. If approved, a vote of registered voters in the Fallbrook and Rainbow districts would then take place.

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About the Fallbrook Public Utility District

Established in 1922, the Fallbrook Public Utility District provides imported water and sewer service to 35,000 residents living on 28,000 acres in Fallbrook. About 40% of the district’s water is used for agricultural purposes. The district also produces about one and a half million gallons of recycled water each day that is used to irrigate nurseries, playing fields, landscaped freeway medians, homeowners’ associations and common areas.

About the Rainbow Municipal Water District

The Rainbow Municipal Water District was established in 1953 and is a Special District, organized under Section 71000 of the California Water Code. The District encompasses 80 square miles of rural land and provides water and sanitation services to the unincorporated communities of Rainbow, Bonsall, and portions of Vista, Oceanside and Fallbrook. It is led by a 5-member elected Board.

About Eastern Municipal Water District

The Eastern Municipal Water District (EMWD) is the water, wastewater service and recycled water provider to more than 825,000 people living and working within a 555-square mile service area in western Riverside County. EMWD provides service to retail customers located within the cities of Canyon Lake, Hemet, San Jacinto, Menifee, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Perris and Temecula, as well as the unincorporated communities of French Valley, Good Hope, Homeland, Lakeview, Mead Valley, Murrieta Hot Springs, Nuevo, Romoland, Valle Vista and Winchester.