

R “Ray’ Wang on Drought and Redwood City

R “Ray’ Wang
817 Columbia Circle
Redwood Shores, CA 94065
rw@jhu.edu

Dear Editor,

Proponents of treated waste water or “recycled water” have tried with limited success to raise support through potential cost savings, the Hetch Hetchy issue, and water assessment studies. Having perceptually lost on all these issues, these proponents are now bringing back drought to the discussion. While I applaud the city’s efforts and intent in drought planning, something they have been talking about for the past 2 ½ years, my concerns are focused on the timing of the drought plan announcement and the potential tie in with treated waste water or “recycled water” projects. For many of us, we can potentially surmise that the purpose of "announcing" the drought plan last week in *the Independent* was to bring awareness to a "seemingly" urgent issue that may bolster support for treated waste water or "recycled water".

So, putting the PR spin aside and working in a more constructive and in a more collaborative fashion, the Safewater Coalition wanted to share with you public information from the state's Department of Water Resources' Drought Preparedness Website, where they have a section on Drought Trends. To summarize their findings:

Droughts exceeding three years (e.g. like in 1987-92 that the Mayor was referring to) are relatively rare in Northern California. Reviewing the historic dry periods for the past 100 years, one can deduce that a drought as severe as the last one may not occur for another 50 years. Add to the fact that the current return of above normal precipitation here and in the Sierras, this issue may seem quite moot.

However, the State of California is well prepared, and there is a whole system of actions to be taken around drought preparedness. State agencies have done their work in preparing for the next drought. They've come up with a series of programs. For example, there is a dry year water purchase program established for all water agencies in California in the event we encounter an unlikely drought in the next 50 years.

But let's continue on with some highlights from the latest Critical Water Shortage Contingency Plan. The Governor's Drought Planning in 2000-2001 panel recommended in Phase I of their Record of Decision (ROD) to focus on:

- Existing Water Supply Reliability
- Water Storage
- Conveyance
- Conservation

So should anyone ever quote the State recommending we go with treated wastewater as a major priority, please note that treated wastewater (Recycled Water) is barely mentioned as an option for drought preparedness because of it's cost and the length of time it would make an impact. To be specific, it's only mentioned 6 times in a paper that talks at least 50 to 100 times more on other alternatives. But to be fair it does mention that there are water savings, but the intention was never to target residential areas like Redwood City/Shores. The focus on water efficiency was intended for

R “Ray” Wang on Drought and Redwood City

agricultural and business areas that have the most to contribute. If we look at the State’s plan in financial terms, treated wastewater’s importance equates to 2.1% of 1.9 Billion earmarked for projects based on their report. Not much impact right?

Other main themes in this report talk about reducing the burden on the water supply system. This would mean smart growth or limited growth based on living within our means. As the Public Works department loves to tout, we are 1000A/F over our water allocation. That to me translates to, we are living beyond our means. So, if we add Marina Shores, and other development plans, we are really stretching our needs. How much are we over? Is that the real reason we are pushing for "recycled" water? or is it the drought? Still worried about the drought, let’s build some excess storage tanks and work on conveyance and transfer issues with the regional water board. Want to build Marina Shores, let’s talk about living within our environmental constraints.

Given impending budget costs, we strongly urge Redwood City to prudently and wisely spend precious resources and leave some room (if they have to) for taxes and assessments to support more impactful and beneficial programs that may be cut with the next budget. Programs such as education, healthcare, public safety, and safety net program may be at risk. Where will the money come from then? Recently, the governor just reduced \$3.6B in Medi-Cal expenditures.

Unnecessary utility rate increases on top of existing increases for such a basic resource like water in this kind of economy also seems so improper to our citizens. Let's face it, \$37M is a lot to spend/borrow/or float a bond. We also have developers eager to contribute \$7M. What’s the motive and what’s their return for such a sizable investment? Please note, I’m not against developers and development, they are essential to build tax bases, but we must balance sustainable growth with health environmental impacts. We are clearly over our water allocation and will be even more so if we move forward. How does that affect our water allocation?

Going back to some earlier concerns, given the choice of having brown grass versus unknown or undiscovered health effects, I think the answer is obvious. The state has not done the required research to prove that treated wastewater is safe. We can only say that nothing has happened yet to other people. How reassuring is that? Why risk our health until we know for sure? Why rush into treated wastewater without guaranteeing the HOA’s right to choose and refuse treated wastewater in our communities? What’s the motivation again? Let’s just make sure this does not result in having treated waste water in residential areas as a solution.

Warmest regards,

R “Ray” Wang
Redwood Shores Resident
President, Regatta HOA
Notary Public