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Robert Merrill on item
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City of Fresno Water Infrastructure Project (Recharge Fresno)

City Council meeting February 26 2015

My name is Robert Merrill, I reside in Council District 6, and I have a PhD in Geology.

As a geologist with knowledge about Fresno's underground aquifer and the limits to our **FINITE** water supply. I support the proposed Water Infrastructure Project as necessary and long overdue. We must act now to protect our groundwater for the current generation and the future. The current overdraft is not sustainable, and we must act to clean up those parts of the aquifer where the water has become contaminated.

The proposal before you will use Fresno's surface water allocation to replace much of the current overdraft over a period of many years. Though that surface water allocation may vary, especially in drought years, the surface water available will allow the City to reduce groundwater pumping, and shutoff contaminated wells. These actions combined with increased water recharge basins adding to the groundwater will allow our aquifer to recover over years.

The City's surface water allocation is like wages, which replenish our checking account, while our groundwater is the savings account to be used in emergencies, such as droughts. Fresno's groundwater savings account is **not unlimited, it is FINITE**, and we have been excessively overdrawing that account.

My knowledge of past climatic changes, especially droughts, suggests that this Water Infrastructure Project is necessary to address the coming impacts of climate change. Postponing a decision favoring this project will only make future corrections of past mistakes more expensive, as well as constraints of per capita consumption more severe.

If changes are to be made, my suggestion is to limit them to putting a few more dollars into addressing conservation and a maintenance reserve fund.

Nobody likes raising taxes or rates, but those are the choices we must make for the government services we receive. There is no free lunch, there is no unlimited clean water supply. Recall further that Fresno's economic base is agriculture, which also requires water, and urban sprawl along with population growth is in competition with us for our **finite** water supply.

At the four City Water Forums, I've heard fears that the proposed SE water treatment facility is to provide for growth for development. Whether or not this is true may be debatable, but the proper place to address that issue is in the City's General Plan. Therefore, My suggestion is for the City to substantially increase development fees to pay for the additional costs sprawl puts on the city budget. When developers come before the City Council with requests to undo parts of the General Plan, simply ask where is the water supply, and who is paying for past infrastructure investments funded by our current citizen ratepayers.

Robert D. Merrill