Community Reacts To PWP Rate Increase

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Although more than 25 community residents and business owners showed up to offer their opinions on the Pasadena Water & Power's (PWP) proposed water rate increase at the June 8 City Council meeting earlier this month, less than half were present at the public hearing continuation earlier this week.

In the time between the two meetings, the PWP suggested and posted possible modifications for the original proposal. But at the continued public comment portion on June 22, only seven individuals approached the podium to tell the City Council their thoughts on and suggestions for the recent modifications to the PWP rate increase.

Following the public comment period, the City Council unanimously approved the modified edition of the original PWP proposal. The modifications include phasing in a flat fee increase over a three-year period instead of a two-year period, providing a credit to consumers in Blocks 4 and 5 for revenues that exceed the actual penalty costs imposed by the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) and providing rate relief from Block 5 for efficient water consumers.

David Powell, one of the residents who spoke at the meeting, is disappointed in the City Council for moving forward with the modified proposal so rapidly, and maintains that there was no time for public analysis of the suggested modifications.

"The first time the modifications saw the light of day was when they were posted on the City's Web site on Thursday evening," he said. "I didn't have time to fully digest them and others didn't either."

"There are a lot of unanswered questions," Powell continued, "and I didn't see any of them addressed."

Nancy Nelson, who also spoke at the June 22 public hearing on the proposal, agreed. Nelson believes the "people's voice was dismissed with one fell swoop of unanimous consent by the city government."

"The modifications are the only check and balance that is in place and we will have to wait and see how this will affect the city," she said.

But it was the community's input at the June 8 meeting that pushed the PWP to suggest the adopted modifications, believes Paul Little, Pasadena Chamber of Commerce President. The public's voice was vital in the passage of the adjusted proposal, he said.

"Had there not been input from individuals, the Chamber, large customers and ratepayers, I expect the original recommendation likely would have passed," Little said.

That said, the modifications are not strong enough, Little believes.

"I think the three year phase in is a step in the right direction, but really doesn't go far enough to help PWP customers from having to make cuts elsewhere to adjust for the significant increase in water costs they will see over the next couple of months," he said. "The three year proposal moves in the right direction but really isn't enough to mitigate the significant impact to residential and commercial customers."

But the City Council's decision was not without supporters. Michael Hurley, the seventh speaker during the public hearing on Monday, said Tuesday that he believes the Council did what they had to do and is now hopeful the City will figure out a plan for water use and availability in the challenging decade ahead.

"Although painful, it was the proper thing to do," he said. "If you don't recover your costs, you are not going to be able to do the proper planning necessary to get us through this difficult fiscal situation."

Now that the proposal has passed, Mary Dee Romney, of Pasadena, believes that residents should keep an eye on City leadership and concern themselves with the future of water in Pasadena.

"It's not about what people feel anymore about water rates, it's about Council leadership and seeing to it that Southern California gets the water it needs," she said. "Council leadership is very important now. They need to work with agencies to make sure water is getting down here; they need to figure out where do we get the water and how do we get it."

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