

# Majority of PUD customers balk at proposed rate hike

By Nick Baptista / The Valley Springs News / Friday, November 18, 2016

Customers of the Valley Springs Public Utility District have rejected plans to raise rates to finance a new wastewater treatment plant.

The district was looking at building a new \$9.5 million facility on the Coe property approximately one mile north of Valley Springs off Paloma Road. Most of the cost would have been financed through grants and \$3 million in a no-interest loan repaid over 30 years.

The district had proposed a five-year plan calling for sewage rate increases for a typical home from \$49.50 in 2017 to \$81.09 a month by 2020. That money would have been used to pay a yearly debt service of \$100,000.

Wednesday's meeting of the VSPUD Board of Directors was the final opportunity for customers to lodge a protest against the rate hike. It was announced at the beginning of the meeting well over a majority of affected property owners protested the proposed rate hike.

Valley Springs resident Gene Quarton canvassed residential and commercial customers for more than a month gathering signatures in protest to the proposed rate hike.

The water and sewer district mainly situated in downtown Valley Springs has 292 residential and 88 commercial customers.

"I had a lot of help," Quarton said. "It was a joint effort by many and I'm so proud of everyone who took part in it."

He was busy gathering signatures just before the meeting began.

"I wanted to make sure we had plenty of signatures," he added.

Quarton said he would like to see the district continue to use and upgrade the existing wastewater treatment facility at the east end of town off State Route 12/26.

If Valley Springs grows beyond the capacity of the existing facility in a few years, Quarton said VSPUD and Calaveras County Water District should look at developing a regional operation.

Before pursuing plans for a new wastewater facility, VSPUD looked at the option of combining with CCWD, but that proved to be more expensive.

“I didn’t do this to win a popularity contest,” Quarton said. “I worry about the people in Valley Springs who can barely make ends meet. I just wanted to see justice done.”

Improving the existing facility was also an option the board looked at prior to deciding to pursue a new plant. However, many of those improvements would have to be financed directly by the district without the benefit of government grants.

Quarton said he came away from the Wednesday night meeting with the impression the district “really doesn’t know what they’re going to do now.”

VSPUD General Manager Mike Fischer was unavailable for comment Thursday morning.