

Visalia Times-Delta

A higher price for water in West Goshen

Residents will have to conserve water or pay a lot more for it

March 15, 2014

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Groundbreaking

What: Groundbreaking ceremony to mark the beginning of construction to install water lines along Avenue 308.

When: 11 a.m. Wednesday

Where: Ave. 308 west of Road 52

If all goes as planned, residents of a West Goshen neighborhood will be able to drink water from their taps by mid-May.

And just as important to many here, once work to connect their water system to the California Water Service Company's water supply is finished, they'll finally have a reliable water source that no longer breaks down for days at a time, as their current well system has done over the past year and a half.

Laura Trujillo and her son Alex Rojo, 5, right, water their livestock on Avenue 309 west of Road 52 in Goshen on Wednesday. / Ron Holman

In fact, the well they're using is so iffy that some residents worry it may collapse again before the new pipes to the Cal Water system are finished.

But the new water source will bring some big changes for residents here who have only had to pay a flat fee for water — currently \$50 a month per connection — no matter how much they used.

So whether they're on small, rural parcels using little water or if they own larger parcels with livestock and large garden areas that require a lot more water, it hasn't made a difference in how much they paid for water.

That won't last much longer, said Jessi Snyder, a community development specialist for Self-Help Enterprises, a Visalia-based nonprofit that helped residents here obtain more than \$3 million in grant money to pay for connection their four-square-block neighborhood and portions of some nearby streets to Cal Water's system after their wells collapsed in late 2012.

"All that time, behind the scenes, the West Goshen Mutual Water Company has been working with the [California] Department of Public Health, Cal Water and Self-Help Enterprises to install a connection," she said. That work is set to begin on Wednesday, with a scheduled completion of no more than 45 days.

That first phase of the project also will include a single-water meter that will read how much water is used by the whole neighborhood.

With no way of knowing how much is used at each of the 86 connected properties, the monthly cost of that water will be divided equally among them — so heavy water users will pay the same amount as people who use lesser amounts.

“That’s the only way we can fairly divide the bill,” Snyder said, adding that since the amount of water residents here use has never been gauged while they’ve been on the well, nobody can estimate how much their the total monthly water bill may be once Cal Water starts charging them.

Not that cost is the primary concern among the residents right now, said Ron Summers, a resident of Road 48 and a member of the all-volunteer board of directors for the West Goshen Mutual Water Company, which oversees operation of the community wells.

“They all want to know when it’s going to get hooked up. That’s their main concern,” Summers said.

Pricilla Gonzalez, who lives on Avenue 309, said she doesn’t use a lot of water on her yard, but she has neighbors with nurseries or large livestock who likely will be using a lot more water.

“So that’s not fair to us,” she said of splitting the monthly water bill with her neighbors for what is expected to be more than a year.

And some of her neighbors have low incomes, so paying more for water may hurt them, Gonzalez added. “There will be some angry people.”

Snyder said the West Goshen residents will be urged to try to conserve water once the new water system is in to help reduce their water costs.

But for some residents here, conserving water may not come so easy here, as many have never had to had to worry about how much water they used.

“Nobody’s going to like that. We’re used to using water,” said Salvador Franco, noting that even if it costs more, he will not give his five horses less water.

He said he waters his own garden for about 10 minutes a day, but once the new water system is in he’ll limit his watering to two or three days a week to conserve water.

Lucy Hernandez, president of the West Goshen Mutual Water Company, said trees on her property are dying because she stopped watering them after the well problems manifested, and she has asked neighbors to not leave their hoses running in their yards when she saw water running off onto the road.

“Then they’d be watering the road the next day.”

With California in the grip of one of the worst droughts in its history, Hernandez said West Goshen residents should be conserving water even if the neighborhood’s current water problems didn’t exist.

Once the connection to Cal Water’s system is finished, work will begin to plan installing new neighborhood water lines and a meter at each home, but that construction may not began until a year or more, Snyder said.

“Cal Water cannot take over the system like it is now,” as there are water lines that likely are leaking and not up to code, Snyder said. In addition, the maps showing the locations of those lines are lost, so the new pipe project will allow Cal Water to know where they are, she said.

Visalia is the primary user on the water system West Goshen will connect into, and next week the Visalia City Council is expected to approve mandatory water-conservation measures for homes and businesses. They include restrictions on days of the weeks lawns and gardens can be watered and how long that watering may last each day.

Those restrictions don’t extend to Goshen and West Goshen water customers.

Yvonne King, a Cal Water spokeswoman, said her company could order mandatory water restrictions, but it has never done that, and that’s not likely to happen this year, “Because we have enough water supply for 2014.”

But if the drought worsens and restrictions are needed in the future, Cal Water likely would impose them throughout an entire water system, not a portion of it, like West Goshen, she said.