

Porterville Recorder

City extends water deliveries for out-of-city residents

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The City of Porterville's financial commitment to deliver water to east-side residents who live outside the city ended Wednesday, but the council voted during Tuesday's council meeting to continue deliveries until Nov. 7.

As part of an effort to help east-side residents whose wells have gone dry, the city allotted \$10,000 to deliver water to the many 300-gallon portable water tanks put into place by the Porterville Area Coordinating Council (PACC) at residents' homes. This was a temporary setup while waiting for the county to put programs into place that would provide potable and nonpotable water to residents doing without.

However, the \$10,000 allotment ran out as of Wednesday, and council had to decide whether to continue the service. "To date we have clocked 233 man hours," said Public Works Director Baldo Rodriguez. "If we continue to the end of the month, that will be three more fill-ups [and a total cost to the city of] \$11,958."

The city is using a city truck and two employees to deliver water to the 65 or so water tanks throughout East Porterville. Deliveries are made twice a week, and it is expected there will be about 100 tanks in place by the end of November.

PACC announced it will end its water services by the end of this month, in anticipation of the county taking over. City council members decided to extend water deliveries until Nov. 7, hoping that by then the state, county and city will have something more permanent in place.

State, county and city officials have been working together to find solutions for the hundreds of residences without water. While the highest concentration of dry wells is in East Porterville, more and more residents throughout the east and west side of Porterville are reporting their wells have dried up.

Recently, California Gov. Jerry Brown signed an executive order authorizing funding through the California Disaster Assistance Act to provide temporary water supplies to households without water for drinking and/or sanitation purposes. Part of the program would reimburse counties and cities for 75 percent of qualified spending.

Nonprofit organizations would be reimbursed 100 percent.

"The county has to authorize for reimbursement because they're the authority of jurisdiction," said City Manager John Lollis.

On Oct. 15, staff from the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CALOES) met with county and city officials to discuss short- and long-term water solutions. CALOES, according to city staff, indicated that it could pay for necessary water infrastructure, like pipes, to connect county residents to the city's water system.

The state Department of Housing and Community Development indicated it could pay for the individual connection fees. CALOES also suggested it could fund at least one new well needed to connect homes to the city's water system, as well as to provide a water source for filling 1,500-gallon tanks the state may place at residents' homes.

The county is looking toward a mutual-aid program with the city that could involve providing the water source for residents with water tanks, while a nonprofit organization, such as Self-Help Enterprises (SHE), would deliver the water.

"I think the CALOES has quite a bit of money to put into this," said Jessi Snyder of SHE. "Tulare County is way out ahead in documenting the problem and finding solutions."

While solutions are being discussed, there are still a lot of logistics to be worked out, including identifying a water source, and determining how to appropriate the tanks. With the county planning on providing 1,500-gallon tanks for nonpotable water for residents, the question of who will provide the water remains a concern.

"I don't really think anybody expects the City of Porterville to pony up the water for 1,500-gallon tanks," said Snyder.

County and city officials will continue to meet to hammer out details and plans of action.