

THE DINUBA SENTINEL COM

City is asked to sell water

Water would be trucked to people whose wells are dry

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May 21, 2015

Tulare County officials are looking for partners in a new program that provides people whose wells have run dry with potable water.

Dinuba City Council members heard one of their most recent pitches at their May 12 meeting.

After a brief presentation and some discussion, the council directed city staff to look into the matter, mainly to see if the city could give up any of its water and take part in the program.

One area the city should look closely at is the depth of the underground water table that serves the city, Meinert said, and how much those levels have dropped recently.

City staff will also try to predict how much more the water table would be affected over the next few months, which would be a determining factor in whether any water could be sold to the county.

Andrew Lockman, manager of the Office of Emergency Services, said the program in question is being run under the auspices of his agency. But the county has several partners working closely with it on the household tank program:

- Self Help Enterprises completes on-site assessments of the properties where wells have gone dry and does the design work.
- CSET (Community Services and Employment Training) provides the tanks that hold the potable water at each homestead and the plumbing to get the water into those homes. CSET job training students also install those systems.
- United Way transfers water from the suppliers to each household via tanker trucks.
- The Tulare County Office of Emergency Services works with the water suppliers on contract matters, and will be working closely with the city of Dinuba to see whether the city can sell any of its water.

As of the time of the council meeting, there were 1,097 active dry wells in the county, Lockman said, and 86 water tanks were “on the ground” at various places throughout the county.

In a telephone interview Monday, he said the number of “fully operational” tanks and potable water systems now stands at 94, with another 70 in various stages of the approval process. Some of those are in Monson and Seville.

All of those numbers are expected to increase during the upcoming summer.

“We are looking for partners to provide water,” Lockman said to the council members after briefly outlining the parameters of the program. The county buys water from agencies willing to collaborate in the household tank program, and then turns around and donates that water to people desperately in need of it.

How many households does the county anticipate serving with Dinuba’s water, if it in fact is able to sell water to the county? As many as possible, as many as the city’s water table is able to handle, Lockman replied.

That would something the city would have to calculate, Meinert said.

Councilman Mike Smith said the city’s water supply is shrinking, like a lot of places in the state, and noted how water and sewer rate hikes will probably have to be adjusted upward sometime in the months ahead. On top of that, the city needs a new water well that could cost \$2 million or more.

The county's program isn't designed to be anything long-term, Lockman said, and the county will accept anything the city can offer, at whatever terms and price the city feels is appropriate.

Some of the households needing water would be in the tiny village of Monson, a few miles southeast of Dinuba, and Smith asked why the county can't just drill a water well on its own.

Lockman said the county is not a water system operator, and that there is a long-rang plan to come up with the funding necessary for a permanent water well and distribution system to serve Monson. But that project would take some time, probably years, to complete.

Lockman also noted that the county has secured a contract with Cal Water, the water supplier for the city of Visalia, and has talked with water agencies in Orosi and East Orosi about joining the program as well.

Anyone adversely affected by the drought can call the United Way at 211 for assistance, Lockman said. Depending on the individual circumstances, people can be provided with drinking water, food and shelter, among other necessities.

More details about the household tank program are also available at this website: 211tularecounty.org.

Tulare County's Office of Emergency Services can also be reached at 624-7495.