

# Porterville Recorder

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## Connecting to city water could cost \$17,800 per household

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### **There may be programs to help homeowners**

The severe drought, wells going dry and the recent annexation of Tulare County islands into the City of Porterville have sparked concerns about the cost to hook up to the city's water system.

There are several different costs associated with connecting. One of the most expensive measures is constructing the infrastructure — the water lines and physical connections — which is why many of the annexed areas have not yet been connected.

If a homeowner wishes to connect to the city's water, they will be responsible for paying the impact fees, construction infrastructure fees and the cost of installing a meter at their home at an average cost of \$17,800 per household.

Mike Reed, acting public works director for the city, said normally city council will set up a reimbursement plan for a resident wishing to hook up to the city's system. The plan would require the homeowner to pay the full costs of the infrastructure construction for the area. The homeowners would be reimbursed as other residents in the neighborhood hooked up to the system and paid their fees. There is, however, a 10-year limit for the plan, so other residents would have to hook up and pay their fees within 10 years in order for the homeowner who paid the initial costs to receive the reimbursement.

There are some exceptions to the costs. For instance, Vandalia Mobile Home Park's well went dry in May 2014, leaving 19 homes without water. A temporary supply of water was provided by the city by hooking up a meter and PVC pipes to a nearby fire hydrant.

"There was a water main in front of the property so they were able to connect," Reed said, which removed the costs of constructing the infrastructure.

The city was able to get the state to reimburse it for the impact fees and, Reed said, the owner absorbed the costs for the lines which connect the main water line to the homes and meters.

"Neither the state nor the city is able to finance private plumbing connections," Reed said.

East Vandalia Street is another area in need of connecting to the city's water. The area was annexed in 2006 and currently there are five known residences without water. Another 15 to 20 homes have wells with water one day and none the next day, Reed said.

The area consists of Vandalia, Chase Avenue, Roche Street and Poplar Avenue. There are 172 homes in the area and Reed said there are 75 homes that could potentially be out of water as the drought continues.

“A good percentage of the area does not have infrastructure to connect [to the city],” Reed said.

There is about a 900-foot gap on Vandalia where infrastructure does not exist. That is also where at least some of the homes without water are located.

City officials have been working with the state, applying for grants and searching for other resources to help the residents in the area. Reed said if all 75 homes were out of water and the city was able to get a grant from the state, the state would pay for the infrastructure and impact fees.

“The property owners would be subject, on average, to about \$1,200 for the private plumbing connection,” Reed said.

While \$1,200 is a lot less than the average cost of \$17,800, many residents will still have difficulties finding a way to come up with the money. Reed said there are some other resources available that may be able to help homeowners.

“A homeowner can pull permit, buy their own materials and install themselves,” Reed said. The work would still need to be inspected and approved by the city, but it would be much cheaper.

“If the situation is serious enough there are nonprofit organizations that have contributed to private plumbing costs,” Reed said.

Self Help Enterprises and American Red Cross are organizations Reed said may be able to assist homeowners.