

The Porterville Recorder

EP hookups continue

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By Myles Barker

Residents still slow to sign up

So far only three more homes in East Porterville have been hooked up to the city's water system in addition to the first home that was hooked up on Aug. 19.

In an attempt to increase that number before the Sept. 1 deadline, the city of Porterville, as well as the drought resource center operated by Community Services Employment Training (CSET), have decided to hold events to get more signed up. The events are for East Porterville residents who have already signed and turned in a consent form so they can sign an Extraterritorial Service Agreement (ESA), a document that gives the city permission to serve water outside of its jurisdiction.

Mike Reed, the public works director for the city of Porterville, said the first event was held Sunday at the Porterville Public Library where 113 people completed their ESAs, something Reed said is a big deal because the way he sees it, it is the hardest part of the process.

"Most think they are done after the consent form, but they have to also sign the ESA agreement and once they sign that it goes to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) and they give a formal document saying you have the right to receive water out of jurisdictional boundaries," Reed said.

Only after the first two steps are completed can residents start the third and final step, which is to set up a utility account with the city, a step only 24 residents have completed, 21 of which have had West Valley Construction install a water service from a water main to a water meter box.

Once the city is aware that a water service has been installed, Reed said they will then look to see if the property owner or the tenant has set up a utility account at which point a water division team will install a meter and a backflow preventer to protect potable water supplies from potential contamination or pollution. Afterwards, CSET will go in to run pipes on the property and make the connection.

However, due to the lack of residents signing up, Jessi Snyder, the community development specialist for Self-Help Enterprises, said only one home is being hooked up a day, a number she said will increase as more people get on board.

"They will definitely be ramping up to at least two a day, and if we have enough folks who open their account, then we can get rolling a little bit faster," Snyder said.

Phase 1A is to hook up approximately 70 homes along city water lines.

Snyder said for those who don't live next to an adjacent water main, construction of new mains will begin next week.

Shawn Schwartzenberger, a retired military soldier, rents a property along Holkom Street, and said the East Porterville Water Supply Project is a perfect opportunity for residents, and doesn't understand why anyone would not take advantage of it.

"I think it is an awesome opportunity," Schwartzenberger said. "The water table is dropping so eventually everybody's well is going to end up going dry so if they've got the chance to go ahead and hook up to the city, then take it, why would you not take advantage of it."

Schwartzenberger said once he found out that if he waited too late then it would be up to the owner to come up with funds to connect, he immediately got to work.

"It was the owner's decision, but she kind of asked how we felt, and I felt that it would be nice to know that we've got a solid stream of water coming and not have to always have that in the back of our mind that maybe the water is not going to be here tomorrow," he said.

Karleen Ceballos, who lives a few houses down from Schwartzenberger, said she thought about hooking up to the city's water system, but declined after she was told that she would have to abandon her well.

"As far as I know there is nothing wrong with my well," Ceballos said.

Nothing may be wrong with her well, but lately it hasn't been working like it used to, mainly in the late afternoon, which has caused Ceballos to change her schedule from taking showers, washing dishes and doing laundry in the afternoon to early in the morning.

"My water goes on and off because the motor doesn't work very well," Ceballos said.

She noted that she would rather try to get her well fixed than to hook up to the city's water system because she has faith it will work like it used to one day.

"I will just cross my fingers and hope that our well works," Ceballos said. "I think it is a good thing what the city is doing because a lot of people are running out of water, but what happens when the city runs out of water, and then we will be stuck with everybody else and be out of water. I hope I am never ever going to regret it because it is going to be costly if we do."

The city will hold three more sign-up events, one being at the Porterville Public Library on Sept. 15, and two at the CSET Drought Resource Center on Sept. 10 and Sept. 21. For more information, call (559) 782-7460.