ABC10

Well failure leaves 8 River Road households without primary water source

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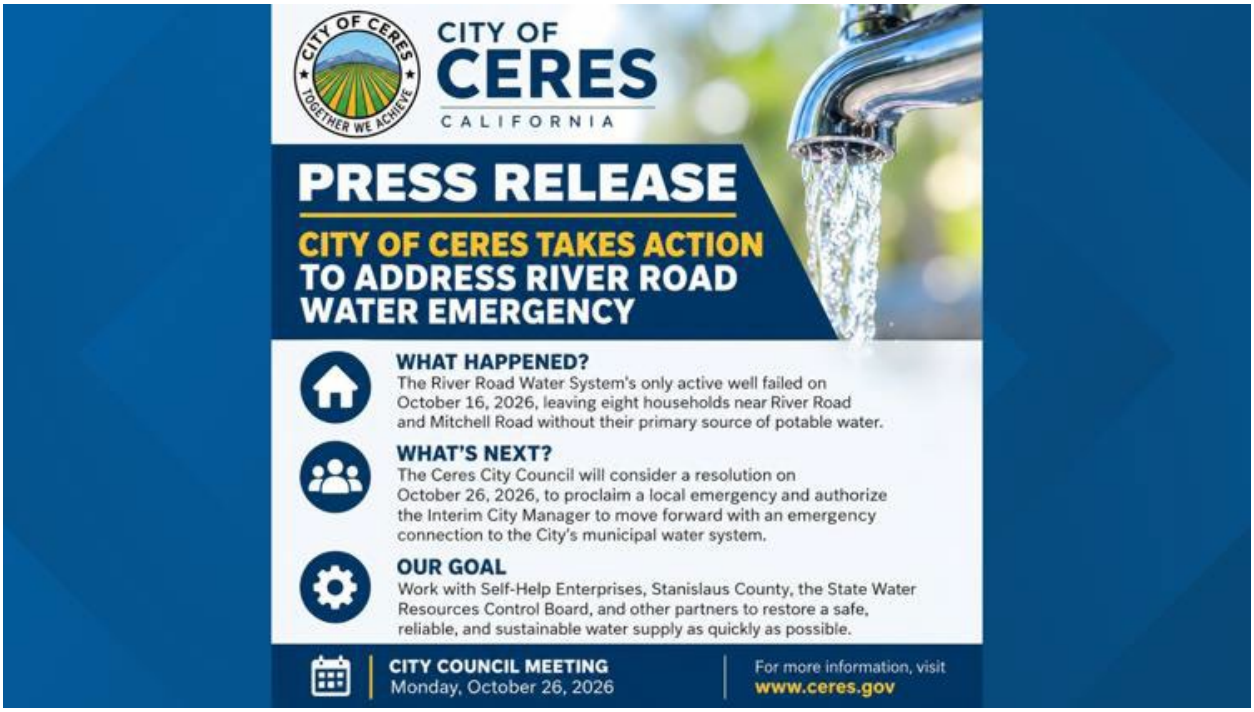
By: ABC10 Staff



CERES, Calif. — The Ceres City Council will consider declaring a local emergency Monday after the failure of a community's only active groundwater well left eight households near River Road and Mitchell Road without their primary source of drinking water.

The well serving the River Road community failed Oct. 16, according to the city. The River Road Mutual Water Company operates independently of Ceres and provides water to eight residential households.

The council is scheduled to meet at 6 p.m. Monday, Oct. 26, to consider a local emergency declaration and measures to help connect the River Road community to the city's water system.

Self-Help Enterprises, a nonprofit that helps low-income families and rural communities access housing and essential services, is coordinating with agencies to address residents' immediate needs.

As of Oct. 20, temporary water storage tanks and water deliveries by truck were in place at each residence, and bottled drinking water was being provided as needed, according to the city.

The community has faced ongoing water supply challenges, and efforts to find a long-term solution have been underway for several years, the city said. The well failure has made finding an alternative water source urgent.

The city said temporary assistance provides short-term relief, but a permanent solution is needed to restore a reliable water supply for drinking, cooking, bathing, sanitation and other household needs.

“This is a serious situation affecting families who have lost access to a basic necessity,” Interim City Manager Steve Williams said. “Our priority is to work with the residents, Self-Help Enterprises, Stanislaus County, and the State to identify the quickest responsible path toward restoring a reliable water supply.”

The council approved an agreement in August 2024 that laid the groundwork for connecting the community to Ceres' water system. The proposed connection would allow River Road residents to receive drinking water from the city.

Ceres staff is working to get contractor quotes, evaluate necessary improvements and coordinate with regulatory agencies to determine how to complete the project. The city is also working with Self-Help Enterprises and the State Water Resources Control Board to identify grants and other financial assistance that could help cover construction costs.

Under the existing agreement, the River Road Mutual Water Company and affected property owners are responsible for the connection costs. The city said it hopes to secure outside funding to reduce the financial burden on homeowners while ensuring existing city water customers do not have to cover costs associated with the privately operated system.

One resolution on Monday's consent calendar would declare a local emergency related to the well failure and authorize the interim city manager to make agreements needed to move the connection project forward.

A second resolution would waive the required hydrant meter deposit for Self-Help Enterprises to help facilitate emergency water deliveries. A third would authorize emergency construction of the connection, award a construction contract, allow the interim city manager to make necessary agreements and approve a budget amendment.

The city said the emergency declaration would formally recognize the public health and safety concerns caused by the well failure and allow agencies to coordinate more quickly.

Construction would still require the necessary agreements, regulatory approvals and separate City Council authorization for construction activities and spending.

The city said it is committed to working with regional partners to help residents obtain a safe, reliable and sustainable water supply.