

**CSD Staff Proposes
2.5% Rate Increase
in 2025-26**

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Outline Water Plan
Proposals**

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RIVER VALLEY TIMES

41ST YEAR • ISSUE 6 *Serving Rancho Murieta, Sloughouse, Wilton* MARCH 21, 2025

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INSIDE**

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A FACELIFT**



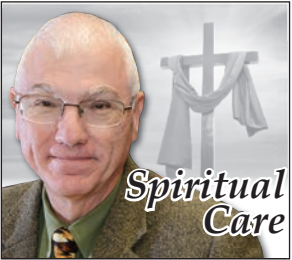
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**YOU CAN ASK
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Little League Celebrates 34 Years



Cosumnes River Little League kicks off its 34th season March 8 with its Opening Day ceremony at Stonehouse Park. Lilah Wiley, left, and Michalea Walker carry the banner at the parade's beginning. Photos by Gail Bullen

**By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter**

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Beneath clear blue skies and warming sunshine, the Cosumnes River Little League (CRL) kicked off its 34th season in Rancho Murieta on March 8.

The celebration began with a parade of 31 teams caravanning to Stonehouse Park, where they gathered on the main baseball field for the opening day ceremony.

Event highlights included introducing the



All 31 teams parade to the ceremony in the back of decorated pickups or trailers, such as the spirited Longhorns.

teams and Cosumnes River Little League Board members, presenting the colors, a short program recognizing the volunteers and

sponsors, and the ceremonial first pitch of the season.

The parade, led by a Sacramento Metropolitan

Fire District engine and ambulance, kicked off on Murieta Parkway and concluded at Escuela Drive, where enthusiastic spectators lined the route. Each team rode in its creatively decorated chariot and high-spirited players tossed candy to the crowd.

After the teams arrived at the park, Dan Stephens, who has two players in the league, introduced each team as they ran onto the field to loud applause from hundreds of spectators.

The ceremony began on a patriotic note. Stephens

Continued on page 12

CSD Board Votes to Bring Back General Manager



Rancho Murieta Community Services District General Manager Mimi Morris is expected to return to work.

**Story and photo
by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter**

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Rancho Murieta Community Services District General Manager Mimi Morris, who has been on paid administrative leave since Jan. 6, may soon return to work.

Following a closed session on March 14, Rancho Murieta Community Services District Vice-President John Merchant announced the board's decision upon returning to open session.

"As a result of the closed session today, we took a vote of four to nothing of the board that was present," Merchant said. "The general manager will be returning from administrative leave. That is the end of the statement."

The session addressed two agenda items: "Conference with legal counsel – anticipated litigation" and "Public employee discipline/dismissal/release, administrative leave status." The closed session lasted just over an hour.

President Steve Booth was excluded from the closed session. The remaining board members conferred by phone with a colleague of District Counsel Patrick Enright and an attorney representing the Golden State Risk Management Authority, the district's insurer.

When contacted for comment, Morris stated that she had not been informed about the 10 a.m. special meeting and was only notified of the board's decision at the end of the day. She added that her return date was still to be determined.

"Recall that I was originally placed on administrative leave pending the results of the investigation of Director Booth's behavior. However, I have not yet been interviewed for the investigation and have no knowledge that it has begun," Morris said in an email. "That being said, I look forward to returning to the district – hopefully to a non-hostile and non-retaliatory

Continued on page 2

Unexpected Apology About Water Plan at CSD Meeting

**Story and photos
by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter**

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - An unexpected apology emerged as a surprising topic when the Rancho Murieta Community Services District (CSD) improvements committee met on March 11.

During public comments, community activist Janis Eckard publicly apologized to the consultants who prepared the draft Integrated Water Master Plan. One of them was Lisa Maddaus, who briefly attended the meeting. Maddaus defended her work on the plan and offered to attend the next improvements committee meeting to answer questions.

In other business, two engineers from Water System Consulting outlined preliminary proposals to prepare an Urban Water Supply Plan, and a Water



Community activist Janis Eckard apologizes to the consultants who prepared the Integrated Water Master Plan. She spoke at the Rancho Murieta Community Services District Improvements Committee meeting on March 11.

Vision Plan intended to supplement the Integrated Water Master Plan. The district's contract engineer, Joe Domenichelli, also outlined his recommendations for constructing a new water tank and optimizing the use of existing tanks. (See the two separate stories on these topics in this issue.)

The improvements committee comprises two board members—Directors Randy Jenco and John Merchant, Operations Manager Eric Houston, General Manager Mimi Morris, who was on leave and other staff. The committee thoroughly examines infrastructure issues and makes

recommendations to the entire board.

Maddaus Comments

Maddaus, who co-produced the draft Integrated Water Master Plan with Oregon engineer Dan Adkins, introduced herself during public comments. Expressing her desire to

Continued on page 9



Consultant Lisa Maddaus defends her work on the master water plan and accepts Eckard's apology.

Blood Drive Moves to Temporary Location



Donor Carole Thames jokes with phlebotomist Christian P. at the October Blood Drive held at the Rancho Murieta Community Church. Photos by Gail Bullen

By Patti Keating

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Thanks to the persistence of key individuals, dedicated donors, supportive businesses and committed volunteers, the Rancho Murieta Woman’s Club and Vitalant have secured a temporary location for the remaining blood drives in 2025.

The club’s Vitalant blood drives will be held at the St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Church under the sponsorship of the Knights of Columbus. Vitalant has made the necessary arrangements to avoid any disruption of the 2025 drives, which will be held on April 28, July 14 and Oct. 27.

The women’s club sought a temporary facility after learning that its current partner, Rancho Murieta Community Church, plans to remodel its space. The church has been a steadfast supporter, with Pastor Phil Fuller generously providing space for community blood drives over the past five years. Fuller, along with church staff members Cindy Aisten and Shana Baggaley, has been an actively engaged partner in ensuring the success of these events.

The women’s club extends its gratitude to the Catholic Church for providing the use of its social hall and to Ali Arnerich for initiating the partnership with the Knights of Columbus. The club also looks forward to collaborating with Margaret Scruggs at the church to ensure the continued success of future blood drives.

Volunteers from the women’s club, the community, Scout Troop 633 and the local Veterans of Foreign Wars post are the driving force behind the blood drives. Heartfelt thanks to everyone who dedicates their time and resources, whether it’s making appointment reminder calls, setting up and taking down equipment, registering donors, providing baked goods



Patti Keating announces the results from the last blood drive at the Rancho Murieta Women’s Club luncheon in January.

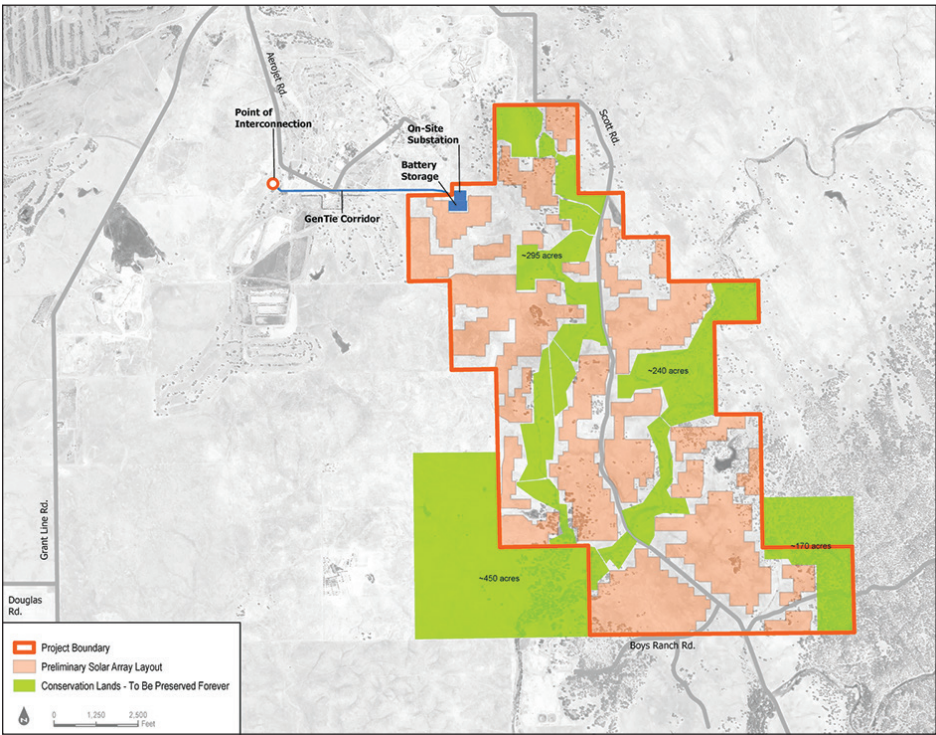
and refreshments, or monitoring donors after they give blood. Your efforts make each drive a success.

Local businesses also contribute to the cause by donating coupons and raffle prizes for blood donors. The women’s club thanks ACE Hardware, The Backyard Restaurant, The Local Bean Café, Go 4 Pizza, Murieta Inn, Naan King, Yogurt Pop, and Carole Thames, Town & Country Real Estate, for their continuing support.

The women’s club extends its sincere thanks to everyone who donated or volunteered at the Jan. 27 blood drive, where Vitalant collected 52 pints of blood. Despite computer system issues that prevented some from donating, the patience and understanding shown by donors were truly appreciated. Both Vitalant and the women’s club apologize for the inconvenience and thank you for your donations and patience. We look forward to working together in future drives.

Patti Keating is a co-chair of the Rancho Murieta Women’s Club Blood Drive Committee. ★

Draft EIR Released for Solar Farm on Scott Road



The graphic depicts layout of a proposed solar facility on Scott Road. Photo courtesy of DESRI

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - After a three-year hiatus, a proposal to build a solar facility on the historic Barton Ranch on Scott Road, six miles north of Rancho Murieta, is back in the spotlight.

The Sacramento County Department of Planning and Environmental Review has released the draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Coyote Creek Agrivoltaic Ranch on its website. It will accept public comments until April 18.

The Cosumnes Community Planning Advisory Council (CCPAC) will review the application at its next meeting, which will be at 7 p.m. March 26 at the Wilton Community Center, 9717 Colony Road, Wilton.

The proposed solar facility will span 2,700 acres of pasture on both sides of Scott Road. It will feature a 200-megawatt solar array capable of powering up to 40,000 homes and a 100-megawatt battery storage system designed to supply power for up to four hours.

The applicant plans to incorporate seasonal grazing around the solar arrays and implement strategic landscaping to help screen

the panels from view. All generated power will be supplied to the Sacramento Municipal Utilities District.

The CCPAC first reviewed the project on Feb. 2, 2022.

While some attendees raised questions, the project faced no significant opposition. Three nearby ranch owners expressed conceptual support for the construction of the solar facility.

The applicant, Sacramento Valley Energy Center LLC, is part of D.E. Shaw Renewable Investments, which is based in New York City. The firm is also developing a second solar farm in Wilton, located on Dillard Road, which is currently underway.

The applicant hosted an informational meeting about the Coyote Creek project at the Rancho Murieta Country Club on Oct. 13, 2021, but only two community members attended.

The term “agrivoltaic” in the project name refers to the simultaneous use of land for solar photovoltaic power generation and agriculture.

At Coyote Creek, this will involve integrating livestock operations with clean energy production, according to consultant Jim Gillum, who represented

the applicant at the CCPAC meeting.

The county notice stated that the draft EIR identified significant and unavoidable impacts to some oak woodlands and a scenic road. However, the draft EIR outlines two alternatives to help mitigate these impacts.

The Biological Resources Alternative proposes shifting 55 acres of solar panels from the development area to a 480-acre parcel adjacent to the project site. The Scott Road Buffer Alternative would eliminate all solar development within 500 feet of the centerline of Scott Road to reduce visual impacts. This option would involve relocating 181 acres of solar development to the adjacent 480-acre parcel.

The draft EIR identified several other potentially significant impacts that could be minimized through mitigation measures, including effects on air quality from construction, impacts on plants and animals, and the risk of wildfires.

The draft EIR can be viewed at planning.saccounty.gov/Pages/Coyote-Creek-Agrivoltaic-Ranch.aspx. Comments can be sent to CEQA@sac-county.gov.

This story is online at therivervalleytimes.com ★

CSD Board Votes to Bring Back General Manager

Continued from page 1

environment – so that we can continue making progress on important district business.”

Morris has been on paid leave since Jan. 6, when the board held a special session to evaluate her performance.

Before the board

adjourned to a closed session—excluding Booth—Morris publicly accused him of retaliation, discrimination and harassment. She also revealed that she had filed an internal complaint against Booth following the November board meeting.

Booth responded on Jan.

7, stating, “I categorically deny that there has been any discrimination against her for any reason.”

During the Jan. 6 closed session, the board voted 4-0 to place Morris on administrative leave pending an investigation of her grievance. Two days later, Morris’ attorney

filed a government claim against the district, elaborating on her allegations against Booth. Under California law, employees are required to file a government claim before initiating a lawsuit against a governmental entity, allowing time for potential resolution before litigation.

The board met again in closed session prior to the Feb. 19 meeting’s open session to consider Morris’ government claim. Booth later announced that the board had voted unanimously to deny her claim.

Contacted by the River Valley Times after the February meeting, District Counsel Patrick Enright confirmed that Morris would have six months to

file a lawsuit following the board’s denial of her government claim. Enright said Golden State Risk Management Authority was handling her claim and Kramer Workplace Investigations was investigating her grievance. He confirmed that Morris remained on paid administrative leave.

This story is online at therivervalleytimes.com ★

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By Sean P. Thomas
MPG Staff

The staffer, who has not been named, was placed on leave after allegedly using the material titled “History of the N-Word,” that included the racial slur, as well as a racist character

The intervention lesson was linked to a non-affiliated District website that included an article that attempted to trace the origins of the “n-word.” The

The middle school sent a letter to families March 3 informing them of the “inappropriate material” and its allegedly racial

Several concerned parents spoke during the district's most recent board meeting, calling for more

“While I recognize that the matter is under investigation, I must say unequivocally that the letter referred to as racially offensive in its letter is a matter of fact, racist to its core,” Jessica Carter said. “My fear is that the adults who are responsible for this material will skirt responsibility, and we will not see the change that is needed at our schools.” Incidents like this demand immediate and decisive action.”

“To all of the members of the public who spoke here today, thank you for the feedback,” Vargas said. “We appreciate it and we take these matters very very seriously.” ★



Lost Lake, the feced retention pond on Reynosa Drive, is looking much better these days thanks to the collaborative efforts of the Rancho Murieta Community Services District (CSD), the Rancho Murieta Country Club and dedicated neighbors. The photo on the left shows a large floating harvester operated by Solitude Lakes to remove aquatic weeds from the pond's surface. The CSD funded this \$25,000 project. Once the rainy season ends, Solitude will apply a biologically safe weed retardant and install two fountains to enhance the lake's health and appearance. Above, the photo highlights the country club's maintenance work along the golf cart path above the lake. This includes tree trimming, brush removal and the replacement of the post-and-cable fence. Neighbor Serda Folk, who advocated for the work, expressed her appreciation for the teamwork among the involved agencies. She also extended her thanks to CSD Director Linda Butler for her support. Photos by Gail Bullen

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Water Tanks, Emergency Supplies are CSD Meeting Topics

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Water topics once again dominated the agenda at the Rancho Murieta Community Services District (CSD) Improvements Committee on March 11.

District contract engineer Joe Domenichelli elaborated on his recommendation to build a new water tank and to implement an interim solution to enhance the efficiency of the two existing tanks.

Director John Merchant proposed two actions for the March 19 board meeting: approving and establishing an emergency water policy and forming a working group to review data from the Integrated Water Master Plan.

In other water-related business at the meeting, two engineers from Water System Consulting outlined preliminary proposals to prepare an Urban Water Supply Plan and a Water Vision Plan intended to supplement the draft Integrated Water Master Plan.

Longtime community activist Janis Eckard also apologized to the consultants who prepared the draft Integrated Water Master Plan. (See the two separate stories on these topics in this issue.)

The Improvements Committee consists of two board members—directors

Randy Jenco and John Merchant, Operations Manager Eric Houston, General Manager Mimi Morris, who was on leave, and other staff. The committee thoroughly examines infrastructure issues and makes recommendations to the entire board.

Water Tanks

The discussion on Domenichelli’s water tank recommendations continued from the committee’s February meeting.

Although the engineer didn’t attend the earlier meeting, Director of Operations Eric Houston reviewed his draft report. Afterward, Merchant instructed Houston to invite Domenichelli to the March Improvements meeting to answer questions. Although Domenichelli attended the March meeting as requested, Houston was absent due to jury duty.

Nevertheless, Domenichelli delivered a PowerPoint presentation illustrating the sharp drop in water levels at the Rio Oso tank during last July’s heat wave.

The pressurized Rio Oso Tank, which holds 1.2 million gallons, serves houses north of the second Guadalupe Drive. It also has been designated as the water tank for the already approved 198-lot Residences subdivision near Stonehouse Park and for the 116-lot



Engineer Joe Domenichelli points out the precipitous drop in water volume in the Rio Oso Water Tank during the July 2024 heat wave. Photo by Gail Bullen

Village H in the proposed Rancho North subdivision. The 3-million-gallon Van Vleck Tank uses a gravity system to serve the remainder of the community.

Domenichelli emphasized the need for a new tank in the upper zone to support current and future water demands as new homes come online.

Until a new tank can be built, Domenichelli proposed a throttling alternative as an interim solution to balance water levels between the two existing tanks. This would involve installing valves that automatically adjust water flows during peak demand periods, especially in the early morning when upper-zone irrigation is highest.

Merchant and Jenco asked Domenichelli if the throttling system could be operational by next summer. He responded that it would be a challenge. While designing the system and overseeing the

“I would like to establish a requirement that going forward, to maintain no less than a one-year supply of water as gross storage for an emergency supply.”

—CSD Director John Merchant

work would be straightforward, integrating the necessary electronics for automatic operation posed a greater difficulty.

“You are going to need specialty people in there with the SCADA and integrating the controls,” he said. “It’s different from guys putting in the pipe.”

After discussing which reserves could fund the interim solution, Merchant

and Jenco agreed to make it an action item for the March 19 board meeting.

Emergency Water

Another agenda item was a letter from Merchant addressed to the district’s existing and entitled ratepayers. Citing limited water sources from the Cosumnes River, he stated that the board must approve and establish an emergency water policy for existing ratepayers and those in county-approved subdivisions (The Residences, Riverview and The Retreats).

“I would like to establish a requirement that going forward, to maintain no less than a one-year supply of water as gross storage for an emergency supply,” Merchant explained at the meeting.

Merchant stated that the first step would be to bring Clementia Reservoir online as a drinking water source, which will require state permitting.

He indicated this would

be just the beginning of the process.

Integrated Water Master Plan Working Group

Although not included in his letter, Merchant told the committee that he planned to recommend a working group review data from the Integrated Water Master Plan at the March 19 meeting.

“We have about 150 questions that we could get answered right off the bat,” he said.

Merchant said that community activist Janis Eckard and resident Jim Farrell, known for his insightful comments at district meetings, had agreed to join the working group.

“We’ll see if we can come up with a consensus as to the data set that we can pass on to finish the analysis,” he said. “There is quite a bit of work to do, which I hope we can do in a hurry.”

This story is online at therivervalleytimes.com ★



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New Consultants Outline Water Plan Proposals

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Proposals to prepare two new water plans were the primary topic when the Rancho Murieta Community Services District (CSD) improvements committee met on March 11.

Two engineers from Water System Consulting presented their preliminary scopes for developing an Urban Water Supply Plan for the district and a Vision Plan to supplement the draft Integrated Water Master Plan. The committee also questioned them about groundwater.

In other business, long-time community activist Janis Eckard apologized to the consultants who prepared the draft Integrated Water Master Plan. The district’s contract engineer, Joe Domenichelli, also outlined his recommendations for constructing a new water tank and optimizing the use of existing tanks. (See the two separate stories on these topics in this issue.)

The CSD improvements committee consists of two board members – Directors Randy Jenco and John Merchant, Operations Manager Eric Houston, General Manager Mimi Morris, who was on leave, and other staff. The committee examines infrastructure issues in depth and makes recommendations to the full board.

Although Houston had invited the new water consultants to the committee meeting, he was unable to attend due to jury duty. Plant Supervisor Travis Bohannon stepped in as the interim director of operations.

Background

Although the Maddaus and Adkins consulting firms presented the draft Integrated Water Master Plan to the district in October, the board took no significant action aside from directing Houston to find consultants for an external review of the study.

A turning point occurred at the Jan. 15 Board meeting when Operations Manager Houston recommended against finalizing the Integrated Water Master Plan, citing its lack of a clear path forward. He proposed that the district develop an Urban Water Supply Plan, which



Engineering consultants Jeff Lawrence and Stephane Ard outline proposals to prepare two new water plans for the Rancho Murieta Community Services. They were speaking at the improvements committee meeting on March 11. Photo by Gail Bullen

the state will require once the district reaches 3,000 water connections and becomes subject to new regulatory requirements as an urban water supplier. The district currently has 2,917 connections.

Houston also told the board that he had asked Water Systems Consultants—who recently developed an Urban Water Supply Plan and Water Vision Report for the City of Folsom—to provide a scope of work for similar plans for the district. Board President Steve Booth referred Houston’s proposal to the improvements committee for review.

Water Systems Consultants (WSC)

Stephanie Ard began by introducing herself and Jeff Lawrence. She has spent the past 12 years specializing in water systems planning and modeling, including the last two years with Water Systems Consultants. Ard noted that Lawrence brings extensive experience in the planning and design of local water and sewer systems. WSC is headquartered in San Luis Obispo, with an additional office in Folsom. The firm employs over 70 engineers specializing in water, sewer, and recycled water, with a heavy emphasis on planning.

Lawrence said that Water Systems Consultants became involved after Houston inquired if they could conduct an external review of the draft Integrated Water Management Plan. Following that, Houston asked WSC to provide a

preliminary scope of work for an Urban Water Master Plan and for “anything that could be added to the master plan.”

Lawrence further explained that an urban plan is primarily a regulatory compliance document, while a master plan serves as a comprehensive water planning document. Ard agreed, noting that the urban assesses existing and projected water demands alongside available supply. It also evaluates supply availability during a normal year, a single drought year, and consecutive drought years. She added that the plan would serve as a report to the state, demonstrating that the district has considered drought scenarios, assessed the reliability of its water supply, and outlined plans for future growth.

“What this does not do is provide a detailed analysis of the water supply alternatives that are available... or an analysis of the reliability of the system as a whole,” she said. “It does not look at storage, it does not look at pumps. These are all included in a master planning documents.”

Lawrence noted that any analysis of the water supply is typically completed prior to developing the urban plan to ensure it is incorporated. While the state requires a small water supplier to prepare the urban plan within a year of reaching 3,000 connections, it doesn’t exact penalties for missing the deadline. However, the supplier is ineligible for state funding until the plan is submitted.

“It’s just assurance to the state that you have planned to have sufficient water supplies to meet your future demands under a drought scenario,” he said.

Ard explained that their next preliminary scope involved developing a water supply assessment plan, similar to the Water Vision Plan she is preparing for the City of Folsom. The first major task would be creating a strategic communication plan focused on gathering input from the community. This would include stakeholder workshops, public surveys, and newsletters.

Ard emphasized that community feedback would shape their final recommendations to ensure the plan “reflects what the community values and what the next steps are.”

Ard said the next step would involve analyzing the water supply, starting with the draft Integrated Water Management Plan. “We would like to do a deeper dive into those assumptions, making sure that is how your system operates and refining that storage analysis,” she said.

The final document would include recommendations on available water supply alternatives, along with a detailed analysis and evaluation of each option to determine which would provide the greatest benefit based on demand and the reliability of the Cosumnes River. Water Systems Consultants would then develop an adaptive roadmap “that would help you know when you need to implement supply alternatives,” Ard said.

Jenco asked how the report would deal with groundwater. Lawrence said that an initial analysis of the aquifer and its capabilities would have to be completed upfront if they were going to recommend groundwater as a feasible option.

He noted that Water Systems Consultants has a hydro-geologic group that could weigh in as part of the assessment.

When Jenco asked about the cost, Ard responded that they preferred not to provide an estimate until they had a clear understanding of the district’s needs and could develop a final scope.

However, when the River Valley Times pressed for a ballpark figure, Lawrence estimated that the water supply plan would likely cost more than \$100,000. The River Valley Times also asked if it would duplicate the Integrated Water Management Plan.

Lawrence acknowledged that the Integrated Water Management Plan consultants had done a competent job, which WSC did not intend to duplicate.

“We could build on some of the water supply planning that is in there,” he said. “This is just a little different process, looking at a little bit more options, getting everything out on the table, being a little more transparent, getting public involvement, maybe reaching different conclusions. It may or may not.

“Our idea was to try to provide additional value and not repeat what you

have already paid someone else to do,” he added.

Audience member Janis Eckard, a longtime community activist, suggested that the district “clean up the data” in the draft Integrated Water Management Plan before the consultants build on it.

At the end of the presentation, Merchant stated that the next step should be providing the consultants with more information to help refine their scope and develop a cost estimate.

Lawrence added that they would also incorporate insights from the meeting to further refine their scope, which they would review with Houston and the committee to ensure alignment. “Then we will put a price on it,” he said.

Groundwater

An extensive discussion about groundwater options took place during the meeting, with Merchant and others questioning the consultants about their experience with drilling wells and groundwater banking in other areas.

The consultants provided informative responses that could be summarized as “It depends.”

An audio recording of the March 11 Improvements Committee meeting, capturing the full discussion, is available on the district’s website, along with the meeting packet that includes the preliminary scopes presented by the two new consultants.

This story is online at therivervalleytimes.com ★

Sacramento Zoo Celebrates Giraffe Birth

Sacramento Zoo News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - The Sacramento Zoo is thrilled to announce that Amirah the giraffe gave birth to a female calf on Saturday, March 1, at 2:56 p.m.

Amirah's calf is healthy and nursing well from mom. The pair will be given bonding time but may be visible at their habitat's side yard periodically beginning in the next few weeks.

The official debut date will be dependent on the health and welfare of mom and calf. Keep an eye out on Sacramento Zoo social media pages for when this new addition to our herd will be visible.

Sacramento Zoo is now home to five female Masai giraffes, Shani, Amirah, Glory, Cheyenne and the new calf. This is the 22nd calf born at the Sacramento Zoo going back to 1954 when giraffes were first housed in Sacramento.

Senior Manager of Animal Care, Melissa McCartney, said “Our entire team is thrilled by how well Amirah and her new baby are doing. We are thankful this was a textbook labor and delivery, with a strong and healthy calf on her feet within two hours of her birth and nursing shortly thereafter.

Mom and calf are bonding behind the scenes and the entire herd is enjoying

looking on and greeting the newest member of our zoo family.”

The Masai giraffe is the largest giraffe subspecies and is found in southern Kenya and Tanzania. Gestation is 14 to 15 months. When a calf is born, it can be as tall as six feet and weigh as much as 150 pounds. Within minutes, the calf is able to stand on its own.

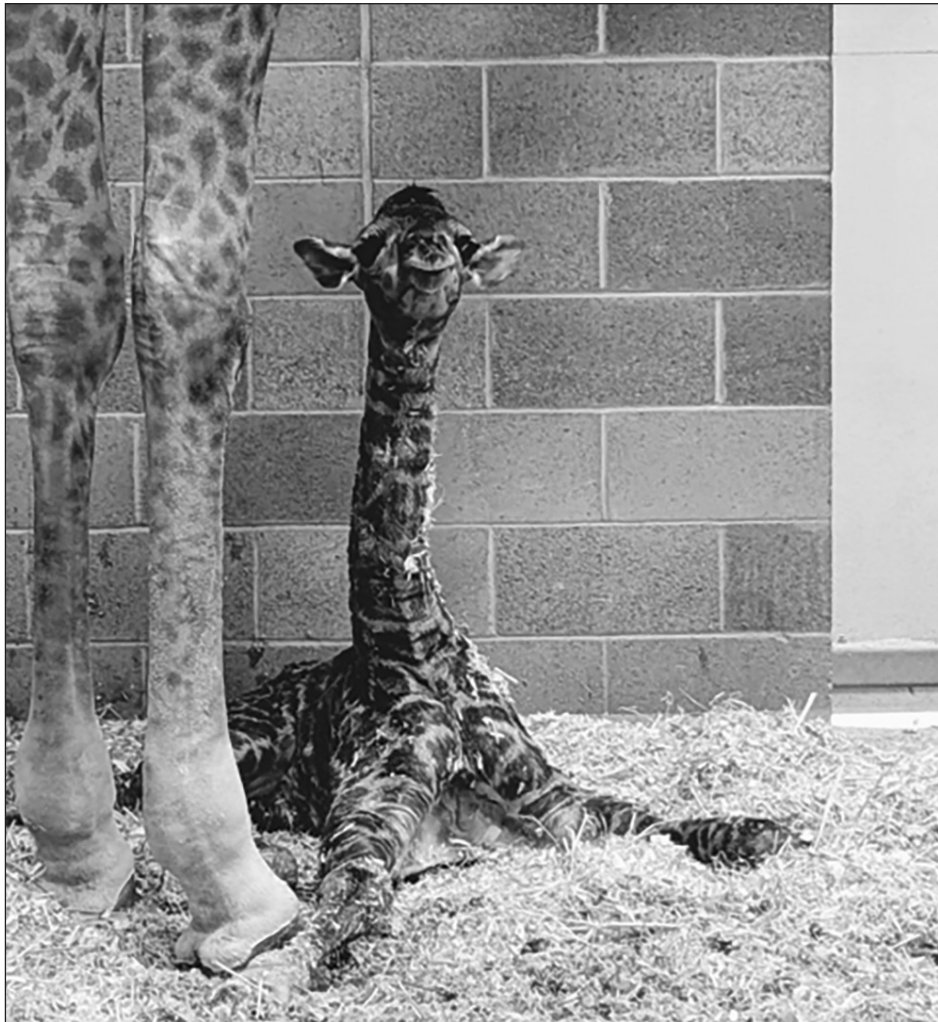
Sacramento Zoo is one of 34 institutions managing 136 Masai giraffes in the Association of Zoos and Aquariums population.

The zoo partners with and supports the Wild Nature Institute, a field research organization that is currently studying Masai giraffe demographics and the African Savanna ecosystem with photo recognition software.

The zoo’s partnership with Wild Nature Institute is critical to giraffe research and conservation efforts.

Wild giraffes are experiencing a silent extinction as their populations continue to plummet due to poaching and habitat loss. It has been estimated that the mammals’ numbers have fallen by more than 50 percent over the last 30 years.

In 2018, the International Union for Conservation of Nature moved giraffes from “Vulnerable” to “Endangered” on its Red List of Threatened Species. ★



On March 1, Amirah the giraffe gave birth to a female calf at the Sacramento Zoo. Photo courtesy of Sacramento Zoo

Kings Korner

By V.G. Harris



The past week for the Sacramento Kings may very well be poorest stretch in a helter skelter season that saw the Sactown boys lose games to the New York Knicks, Golden State Warriors and Phoenix Suns by a combined total of 71 points.

Many Kings fans turned their TV sets to another channel in the fourth quarter of these games to avoid the agony of watching another beatdown. No lighting the beam last week and probably the last thing on anyone’s mind.

Most fans agree that watching a see-saw battle in which your team is giving the best they have will always keep them watching to the very end but what we witnessed in the past week was hard for even the most ardent fan to lay eyes on.

Thrust into the position of point guard with the trade of DeAaron Fox, Malik Monk has struggled in his new role. Most glaring are the constant turnovers and it appears to be contagious as usually reliable ballhandlers DeMar DeRozan and Zach Lavine have suddenly joined the turnover turnstile. Forty-eight times, the Kings have turned the ball over in the past three games and that means 48 missed opportunities to put a shot up.

Entering Monday night’s game against the Memphis Grizzlies, Sacramento sits in the number 9 position in the Western Conference with a 500 record of 33-33.

At no time entering the 2024/2025 season did I believe the Sacramento Kings were a 500 team.

After the firing of Mike Brown and the trading of DeAaron Fox, newcomers Zach Lavine, Jonas Valanciunas and Jake LaRavia gave hope to Kings fans that the playoffs were not a pipe dream.

The bench is stronger but the starting lineup is putting the team in a hole in the first quarter of nearly every game. The past three games saw the Kings down by double digits at the end of the first quarter and climbing out of a hole every game is not a recipe for success.

So what is the answer Kings fans? How does this newly-assembled squad put together a winning stretch that allows Sacramento fans to witness post-season basketball?

With 16 games remaining, there’s no more trading or adding to the team, so coach Christie will have to move the chess pieces he has.

Sadly, although Malik has wanted to be a starter for some time, he has not thrived in his new role. Coming off the bench and adding a spark seems to be the logical move for coach Christie to make.

Jake LaRavia has added much needed defense but Markelle Fultz has failed to add much to the point guard position. Coach Christie might be faced with using rookie Devin Carter who has proven himself to be a skilled ball handler and surprisingly a good rebounder as well.

Perhaps the time has come to give Isaac Jones some more court time, as this team could use his length and rebounding. Jones has received too little time on the court but seems to make an impact when given the opportunity.

Trey Lyles and Keegan Murray need to live up to their billing and add 3-point shooting to a team that is in sore need.

Cross your fingers, Kings fans, that Domantas Sabonis will stay healthy and former all-stars DeMar DeRozan and Zach Lavine will be the players we know they can be the rest of the way.

Many of the senseless turnovers come from players trying to do too much and what the Kings need is to get back to basics and keep it simple. Move the ball, make good passes and allow teammates to shoot the basketball in rhythm.

Make no mistake about it, there is plenty of talent on this team.

Play-in appears to be the logical prescription, so take your medicine Sacramento Kings and see where the Play-in might take you.

King’s fans want postseason basketball and what you call it matters little. Magical things can happen when given a chance and that’s what the play-in brings, a chance.

Stay positive, Kings fans, and keep those TV sets on for the fourth quarter. These guys might surprise you yet!

All the best!

Your thoughts are always welcome at vgharriskingsfan@gmail.com. ★

Social Security Matters

Can I Avoid Paying the Medicare Premium?



By Russell Gloor, AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor

Dear Rusty: Is there any way I can get out of paying the \$185 I am told will be taken out of my Social Security for Medicare Part B when I turn 65? We pay for Medicare all our working lives, and now I have to pay a monthly premium for insurance that only covers 80%. **Signed: Disheartened Senior**

Dear Disheartened: For clarification, the money you paid into Medicare while working during your lifetime was for Medicare Part A (inpatient hospitalization coverage). The Medicare taxes paid while working entitled you to FREE Medicare coverage for Part A inpatient hospitalization coverage, but they do not entitle you to Medicare coverage for outpatient services (coverage for doctors, medical tests, etc.). For that coverage from Medicare, you must enroll in Medicare Part B, for which there is a monthly premium (\$185/month for 2025). If you wish to have Medicare Part B coverage, you must enroll in Medicare

Part B at age 65 - unless you have other “credit-able” healthcare coverage from an employer.

The Medicare Part B premium will be automatically deducted from your Social Security payment when you enroll in Medicare, and there is no way to avoid it if you wish to have Medicare healthcare coverage for outpatient medical services. But, if you currently have “creditable” healthcare coverage from an employer, you can delay enrolling in Medicare Part B (thus avoiding the premium) until your employer coverage ends. If you don’t enroll in Medicare Part B during your initial enrollment period (at 65), or in a Special Enrollment Period following the end of your creditable employer healthcare coverage, then you will incur a penalty for enrolling in Medicare Part B outside of the prescribed enrollment periods. That penalty is a permanent increase in your Medicare Part B premium. FYI, “creditable” is an employer group plan with at least 20 participants.

We do not advise going without outpatient healthcare coverage, so you should carefully consider enrolling in Medicare Part B when you turn 65. If you are already collecting Social Security benefits, you will be automatically enrolled, but you can opt out of Part B if you wish – it’s

just not advisable, unless you have current credit-able healthcare coverage from an employer.

So, to recap: the Medicare taxes you paid while working only entitled you to free Medicare Part A inpatient hospitalization coverage. You must enroll in Medicare Part B (for which there is a monthly premium) to have Medicare healthcare coverage for outpatient healthcare services. Both Medicare Part A and Part B have deductibles and copayments, for which you may wish to consider getting either a supplemental insurance plan or a Medicare Advantage plan. But, in either case, you must still have both Medicare Part A and Part B to obtain such additional healthcare coverage.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation’s staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org. ★

California’s Cities and Schools Face Big Budget Gaps, Few Options



By Dan Walters, CALMatters.org

California’s state budget is mired in what fiscal authorities call a “structural deficit,” meaning its revenues cannot keep up with spending mandated by current law.

For several years, Gov. Gavin Newsom and the Legislature have papered over the chronic gap between income and outgo with gimmicks, including on- and off-budget borrowing and creative accounting, plus dips into “rainy day” funds set aside for emergencies.

Those maneuvers merely postpone the day of reckoning, because the administration and the Legislature’s budget analyst, Gabe Petek, project yearly multibillion-dollar shortfalls indefinitely.

The state’s dilemma has several roots, most notably an erroneously high multi-year revenue forecast in 2022 that led to a belief that there would be an immense budget surplus and to sharply increased spending. The administration later pegged the revenue error at \$165 billion over four years.

That factor was exacerbated by what Petrek dubbed “a sluggish economy.”

“Outside of government and health care, the state has added no jobs in a year and a half,” Petek noted in a November fiscal overview.

“Similarly, the number of Californians who are unemployed is 25% higher than during the strong labor markets of 2019 and 2022.”

State government is not alone in facing chronic budget deficits. The state’s major cities and many school districts are also feeling the pinch of stagnant revenues and inflation, especially with rising worker salaries. Add the horrendous Los Angeles wildfires and President Donald Trump’s potentially huge federal spending reductions and the budget gaps could become even wider.

A few days ago, Matt Szabo, the City of Los Angeles’ chief administrative officer, and city Controller Kenneth Mejia bluntly warned the city council that LA is several hundred million dollars short of covering its budgeted expenditures — not even counting the likely effects of wildfires on revenues and spending.

“The city is facing significant headwinds,” Szabo said, adding “immediate spending reductions required.”

“The city of L.A., financially, we are in trouble,” Mejia told the council in a letter. He added, “The city is estimated to overspend by \$300 million over budget. So when you have less revenues compared to your budget, and you have more expenses over your budget — that’s a big gap that we have to fill.”

San Francisco’s new mayor, Daniel Lurie, says he wants to “eliminate \$1 billion in overspending” over the next three years to cover an \$876 million deficit over two years. “The era of one-time or Band-Aid solutions is over,” Lurie told other officials after taking office in January.

A number of smaller cities, including Sacramento, are also dealing with significant deficits.

Meanwhile many school districts are also facing big budget gaps due to declining enrollment and chronic absenteeism that reduce state aid based on attendance, in addition to the expiration of federal grants meant to cope with COVID-19 and employee union demands for raises to offset inflation-hampered personal budgets.


The Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team, a state agency that monitors school district finances, recently issued a report on school systems in various degrees of fiscal difficulty, with those in Oakland and San Francisco on the list of the most troubled.

The agency cited not only enrollment declines, but the jolts of losing federal pandemic aid and rising costs, particularly for fire insurance and electric power, as factors.

In theory, local officials could seek tax increases as they ponder ways to balance their budgets. However voters facing rising living costs of their own are not likely to approve of that solution.

Therefore the options are either make real spending reductions, which might mean laying off workers and closing schools, or emulate the state’s gimmickry and hope the problems solve themselves.

Dan Walters is one of most decorated and widely syndicated columnists in California history, authoring a column four times a week that offers his view and analysis of the state’s political, economic, social and demographic trends. ★




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Matsui and McClellan Urge Trump Administration to Resume Afghan Ally Resettlement Program

Office of Rep. Doris Matsui
News Release

WASHINGTON, D.C. (MPG) - On March 6, Congresswomen Doris Matsui (CA-07) and Jennifer L. McClellan (VA-04) led 42 lawmakers in a letter to President Trump, expressing serious concern over the significant and harmful impact of recent executive orders to halt refugee processing and admissions and up-end the Special Immigrant Visa program for our Afghan allies.

Prior to the suspension of resettlement efforts, over 1,600 Afghan allies were cleared and booked on flights for travel to the United States. Approximately 10,000 more Afghan allies were approved for entry, with another 40,000 allies navigating the approval process.

“These individuals and their families sacrificed a great deal to support the American government in Afghanistan and to fight for the dream of a free and

democratic Afghan Republic,” wrote the lawmakers. “To turn our backs on these allies in their time of need after they so bravely supported us betrays American values, violates our promise to protect those who assisted the U.S. mission and belittles our reputation on the international stage.”

Following the fall of the Afghan government to the Taliban in 2021, Afghan partners who worked with the United States and their families found themselves exposed and vulnerable to violent retaliation. In response, the U.S. government undertook the largest non-combatant evacuation operation in American history and supported their resettlement and integration into the U.S.

Since 2011, Sacramento has welcomed over 12,000 Afghan refugees, including 1,700 of those evacuated in 2021. Many of these individuals still have family in Afghanistan, who are now forced to live under Taliban oppression

as a direct consequence of the Trump Administration’s executive orders.

“Failing to uphold our promises to allies who are at risk overseas due to their support for the U.S. mission is no way to conduct foreign policy,” the lawmakers continued. “Nor is stranding tens of thousands of refugees who have completed lengthy security screenings and have communities, families and sponsors waiting for them in the U.S. The sudden suspension threatens global security and countless lives.”

The letter highlights stories of Afghan allies, detailing the precarious position they’ve faced since the fall of Kabul and the cruelty of these executive orders.

Rep. Doris Matsui represents California’s Seventh Congressional District, which includes the communities of Elk Grove, Galt, West Sacramento, Wilton, Rancho Murieta, Vineyard, Isleton, Walnut Grove, Herald, Clay and the California Delta.



Rep. Doris Matsui. Photo courtesy of Doris Matsui.

SECURITY LOGS

Following is a summary of activity for the Rancho Murieta Community Services District Security Department for the following dates. Note: these log entries are condensed. For full security log details, go to the CSD website at www.rmcsd.com.

March 7
8:28 p.m., Via De Robles Drive, Report of animal complaint regarding a barking dog. RP did not provide an address and patrol did not hear or observe any barking dogs around Rio Circle. Informed dispatch all clear.

March 8
10:39 a.m., Theft, BelAir Supermarket: Followed up with store manager. Viewed footage of three teenage individuals who came into store; each grabbed a box of sushi and a drink and then proceeded out the door without paying for items taken. One individual was identified; the other two have not yet been identified. Patrol advised store manager to follow up with a report to the Sacramento County Sheriff’s Office.

10:20 p.m., RMA Rule Violation, Riverview Park: Group of juveniles making excessive noise at Riverview Park after hours.

March 9
5:39 p.m., Patrol advised of accident by North Gate officer who observed accident after it occurred at approximately 5:30 p.m. Approached scene and asked if anyone was injured. Driver of white Ram truck said there were no injuries. Upon initial inspection, it appeared the green Subaru had struck the white Ram with its front left fender causing a dent in the Subaru but no damage to the ram truck. Driver of Subaru said she wasn’t injured. Patrol advised vehicles to enter the Chevron parking lot to wait for CHP who had

been called by the driver of the Subaru. Driver of Subaru expressed concern that the truck was going to leave the scene before CHP arrived. CHP arrived at 5:55 p.m.

March 11
1:29 a.m., RMA Rule Violation, Lake Calero: Patrol located unoccupied Dodge Ram. Using vehicle-equipped public address system, made several announcements, requested driver to return to his vehicle; driver complied. Driver was fishing nearby. Driver was advised of the back area/lake fishing regulations and requested to leave area immediately; he complied without incident. Citation issued.

March 13
7:17 p.m., Welfare check, Labranza Street: Upon arrival, patrol made contact with the homeowner and she said she was doing just fine and will call her grandmother soon.

March 14
4:01 a.m., RMA Rule Violation, Camino Del Lago: Vehicle parked overnight on street in front of the house wrong way. Citation issued.

4:05 a.m., RMA Rule Violation, Puerto Drive: Unauthorized RV trailer parked on street without 24-hour pass. Ford SUV parked overnight on street in front of house. Citation issued.

4:19 a.m., RMA Rule Violation, Guadalupe Drive: Trailer attached to Jeep pickup parked overnight in driveway without 24-hour pass. Citation issued.

March 15
12:06 a.m., RMA Rule Violation, Lake Calero: Encountered a silver Nissan Pathfinder. Notified driver the lake was closed and they departed.

1:20 a.m. Callaway Drive: Vehicle at Lake Calero after hours 11:45

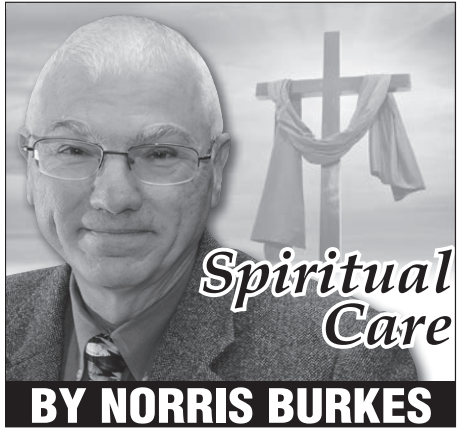
p.m. March 14.

March 16
6 p.m., Vehicle Accident, Lago Drive: Report of a single-vehicle collision; golf cart collided with a tree. Upon arrival made contact with owner of the golf cart. She stated that her son gave their golf cart to his girlfriend. Son is minor, 16 years old; does not possess valid driver license. While driving, was districted by the golf cart rain cover, drifted from the road to the right shoulder, drove up the curb, collided with two small size orange trees, drove up the second tree with passenger side tire, flipped to the driver side and came to stop. Driver did not sustain any injuries. Driver was absent from the scene of the accident upon patrol’s arrival. CHP was dispatched and arrived at 6:55 p.m. CHP interviewed RP and golf cart owner.

7:43 p.m., Animal Complaint, Murieta North: Report of injured bobcat near 6-B Lift Station. Upon arrival, located animal in the middle of the golf cart pathway; animal injured, barely moving. Was able to relocate from main pathway to grass. Dispatch attempted to contact animal rescue; negative results. Animal was left in same location. Request for day shift patrol to check on the animal, advise Animal Rescue if alive.

8:47 p.m., Suspicious Vehicle, BelAir: Reporting party said pickup driver appears to be under influence; driver was swerving while driving, drove up curb in front of BelAir (no damages to property). Patrol located vehicle parked wrong way in Shell drive-thru. Driver did not appear to be under influence; stated he is transient from Jackson to Folsom; will spent night in the area due to malfunctioning tail-lights. Shell owner gave permission to driver to park at station overnight.★

You Can Ask and They Will Tell



Note to readers: The woman in this column is a composite character representing the conversations I’ve had with those seeking chaplain jobs.’

Not long ago, I was working for a hospice group when a woman stopped by my office seeking chaplain employment. Touting her recent graduation from a five-week “chaplain course,” the 70-year-old had questions.

She showed her assumptions early. “I’ll bet you get to lead a lot of people to Jesus in this job.”

“Not really,” I said. “Our patients are from many religious and nonreligious backgrounds that I must respect.”

“Oh,” she said, “So do you have an understanding all religions?”

I shook my head, “Honestly, there are far too many religions to learn them all. I simply ask the patient to share their beliefs. I call this strategy ‘Ask. They’ll tell.’”

She tilted her head like a dog trying to track a high-pitched sound. I kept talking, as I tend to do.

“When you meet a person from an unfamiliar religion, you merely ask them what they believe or how they practice their religion.

“If you are willing to wait for the answers, most folks will tell you all you need to know.”

I took her silence as an invitation to continue.

“But I caution you to ask questions with respectful curiosity. You must show a sincerity that outweighs your determination to convert them.

“If they sense that you are willing to honor their beliefs, they will be forthcoming.

“This process involves a two-way discourse I call ‘Listening Love.’

The strategy serves me well as I often ask patients, “How does your faith inform you about dying?”

“The answers that sprout from these

questions has provided me an impromptu course in world religions.”

“For instance?” she asked.

I told her about a Hmong couple who asked me to help them retrieve a placenta after they lost their newborn. The grieving couple said they would bury the placenta under a tree so the baby’s soul could journey back through the past and become reborn.

When I asked a Muslim father what we could do for his dying child in a combat hospital in Iraq, he asked me to place a Koran in bed with the child.

When I asked my question of two brothers at the bedside of their dying mother, they described a New Age belief quite foreign to me. Nonetheless, I listened for what they found comforting, and together, we tied a crystal around their mother’s wrist.

When I asked a Chinese man what his faith taught him about consoling his dying wife, he suggested we move the hospital bed in the healing direction of feng shui. He saw this movement as the best way to use energy forces to harmonize individuals with their surrounding environment.

I know, these practices seem a bit odd to our Western sense of mainstream religion. Believe me, these encounters pushed me far out of my Christian comfort zone, too.

When a chaplain begins a dialogue with someone of a different religion, he or she must ask themselves-- “Am I seeking the information because I’ve targeted them for conversion – or am I seeking the information I needed to show respect for them?”

Concluding my conversation with the woman, I said “If you really want to become a chaplain, you’ll need to adopt an approach that opens the faith dialogue.

Listen to those of other faiths. Only when you show them respect will you be given the opportunity to demonstrate the love taught by your own faith.”

The woman rubbed her chin, releasing some thoughtful tones, but I’m really not sure what her thoughts were.

But next time I see her, maybe I’ll employ my own advice and simply ask her. After all, “listening love” is probably a strategy for most all circumstances.

Sign up to receive this weekly column in your email box at <https://thechaplain.net/newsletter/> or send me your email address to comment@thechaplain.net.

All of Norris’s books can be ordered on Amazon. Autographed copies can be obtained on his website www.thechaplain.net or by sending a check for \$20 for each book to 10566 Combie Rd. Suite 6643 Auburn, CA 95602. ★

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COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Summerfest Food Trucks Return on Sundays

Food Truck Mania is back at Stonehouse Park on Sundays from 5 to 8 p.m., thanks to Summerfest. The new season began March 7.

A list of food trucks with a link to their menus can be found on the Rancho Murieta Summerfest Facebook Page.

VFW to Remember Vietnam Vets on March 29

The Rancho Murieta Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) will host a local observance of National Vietnam War Veterans Day on March 29 at the Gazebo at 1 p.m.

The program will feature a vocalist, a trumpet player and tributes to Vietnam War veterans and their families for their dedicated service and sacrifices. Refreshments are planned.

RMA Sponsors Rattlesnake Training for Dogs

The Rancho Murieta Association Recreation Committee is sponsoring a rattlesnake-avoidance training session for dogs on Friday, April 4 at the RMA Office.

Call or text 775-234-8844 to schedule an appointment. Or email GetRattledNV@gmail.com.

The cost is \$125 per dog.

Wilton Bingo April 5

Wilton Bingo will be on Saturday, April

5. Doors open at 5 p.m. with food available for sale, and bingo starts at 6 p.m. in the Wilton Community Center (9717 Colony Road, at Dillard Road).

All proceeds go to two non-profits: the local Park Council and the Wilton History Group.

Garden Club Slates Garden Stroll on May 10

The River Valley Garden Club will host a Garden Stroll this year on Saturday, May 10. This event will include a Gala Plant Sale, a Children's Mother's Day Art Project, a raffle, Art in the Gardens and master gardeners to answer questions.

If you would like to offer your garden to be considered for the Garden Stroll, please contact Deb Rooney at debjrooney0120@yahoo.com or Nancy Compton atncompton43@att.net.

If you have pots or plants to donate, please contact Margaret at 916-955-6707 or Deb at 916-730-7403. We can pick them up.

Bookmobile Makes Weekly Stops at Murieta Village

River Valley residents in need of a good book need only show up for the weekly Bookmobile visit from 9 a.m. to noon every Wednesday.

The Bookmobile parks in front of the Murieta Village Clubhouse. Visitors can apply for a library card at saclibrary.org.

The Bookmobile carries a full range of

books. Residents may order books online and have the Bookmobile deliver them.

CSD Establishes Security Hotline Email

Rancho Murieta residents with security issues have a new option for contacting the Rancho Murieta Community Services District to receive a timely response: securityhotline@RMCSO.com.

Residents also can reach security 24 hours a day by calling 916-354-CARE (2263). However, residents experiencing a life-threatening emergency requiring immediate police, fire or ambulance assistance should call 911.

VFW Auxiliary Seeks New Members

The Rancho Murieta Veterans for Foreign Wars (VFW) Auxiliary is looking for new members who are passionate about supporting veterans and military families while benefiting from personal and professional growth opportunities.

Eligibility requires a family relationship to a VFW-eligible veteran such as a spouse, parent or grandchild.

For more information about the local auxiliary, contact President Melissa Mineni at mel.mineni@gmail.com.

If you are interested in joining the Rancho Murieta VFW Post, reach out to Membership Chairman Tylor Fugate at tylorfugate150@gmail.com.

Eligibility for VFW membership

requires honorable service in the U.S. Military and participation in a foreign war, expedition or campaign recognized by the VFW.

Local Crime Records Online at RVT Website

The online edition of the River Valley Times at www.therivervalleytimes.com includes a section called "Local Crime Arrests," which compiles public arrest records for Rancho Murieta and Wilton residents. This section can be found on the right side of the home page.

As of March 3, the map showed the arrests of three Rancho Murieta residents and five Wilton residents.

One Rancho Murieta resident was arrested on a charge of wanton disregard for safety by the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office. One Wilton resident was arrested on a warrant charging him with assault against a peace officer or emergency personnel. He was arrested by the San Jose Police.

River Valley Times Expands Online Coverage

The River Valley Times is providing more timely updates on local events through its online platforms. Certain events are reported within one to two days, ensuring residents stay informed between distributions of the printed edition.

Readers can access updates at therivervalleytimes.com, Or follow the River Valley Times on social media on Twitter at x.com/RVTMPG8 and on Facebook at facebook.com/Therivervalleytimes. ★

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CSD Staff Proposes 2.5% Rate Increase in 2025-26

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Although the Rancho Murieta Community Services District’s final budget and rate increase for Fiscal Year 2025-26 is still pending approval, the draft discussed at the Finance Committee Meeting on March 13 bodes well for district customers.

Under the staff’s proposal, the average customer inside the gates would see a monthly increase of \$6.81, representing a 2.5% rise.

Starting in July, the current monthly rate of \$271.97 would increase to \$278.79.

The average Murieta Village customer would see a \$6.02 increase in their bill, representing a 2.85% rate increase.

Their current monthly rate of \$212.80 would increase to \$218.82.

The proposed increase contrasts sharply with the approved 2024-25 rates, which saw the average customer inside the gates pay an additional \$29.36 per month: a 12.10% increase. Murieta Village residents experienced a \$23.36 monthly increase, representing a 12.33% rise. The 2024-25 rate hikes, approved by the board, were necessary to address the second year of a budget shortfall.

As proposed, the operating budget for 2025-26 will be \$9,583 million compared to \$9,521 million this fiscal year, a \$62,480 increase of 0.7%.

The full board was scheduled to review the proposed draft budget at its March 19 meeting, which occurred after the deadline for this story. The board was also expected to authorize the mailing of the Proposition 218 notice to inform residents about the proposed rate increase.

The Finance Committee consists of two board members—President Steve Booth and Director John Merchant—Mark Matulich, the Director of Administration and Finance; and other district staff. It conducts an in-depth review of financial issues and provides recommendations to the full board.

Matulich told the committee that the overarching goal for the 2025-26 fiscal year was to achieve a balanced operating budget, ensuring that operating revenues for each of the five funds—water, wastewater, drainage, security and solid waste—cover their respective operating expenses.

“We are going to accomplish that through a continued effort to manage costs and then the rate increases,” he said. The proposed budget shows that all funds would be in

SAMPLE BILL					
Proposed FY 25-26					
RANCHO MURIETA COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT					
Average Monthly Customer Bill					
Residential Metered Lot (Inside the gates)		Current Monthly Rates	Proposed Monthly Rates	\$ Change	% Change
		July 1, 2024	July 1, 2025		
Water		1,471	1,471		
Residential Base (excluding reserves)		\$ 52.26	\$ 54.09	\$ 1.83	3.5%
Reserve Contribution		14.00	14.00	-	0.0%
Water Base Charge		66.26	68.09	1.83	2.8%
Water Usage (per 100 cubic foot)		39.86	39.86	-	0.0%
Total Water		106.12	107.95	1.83	1.7%
WTP Debt Service Charge		6.00	6.00	-	0.0%
Wastewater					
Residential Base (excluding reserves)		59.53	61.61	2.08	3.5%
Reserve Contribution		14.00	14.00	-	0.0%
Wastewater Base Charge		73.53	75.61	2.08	2.8%
Solid Waste (avg. 65 Gallon Container)		44.75	46.87	2.12	4.7%
Solid Waste Administrative Fee		3.00	3.00	-	0.0%
Security Tax		32.82	33.48	0.66	2.0%
Drainage Tax		5.75	5.87	0.12	2.0%
Total RMCSD Bill		\$ 271.97	\$ 278.78	\$ 6.81	2.50%
The actual rate increases may be less than but in no case more than the proposed rates above.					

A sample bill for the proposed Fiscal Year Budget for 2025-26 shows how the CSD rate increases would affect the average customer inside the gates. They would pay \$6.81 more a month, a 2.5% increase. Courtesy photo

the black, although by minimal amounts.

The proposed budget includes 24-hour security coverage of the gates and patrol shifts, partially funded by an annual bar-code sticker fee of \$10 per vehicle.

Another key component of next year’s budget was funding for reserves, which support repairing and replacing the district’s aging infrastructure.

“It is a good news story for the district,” Matulich said.

The total anticipated addition to the reserves is \$2.63 million. This includes county property taxes of \$970,000, reserve contributions from the rates totaling \$1,042,733, connection fees of \$193,194, security impact fees of \$18,000, and interest and investment earnings of \$402,312.

Merchant said that means the district would have \$15 million for capital improvements, whether for immediate or long-term replacements and repairs.

“If we were to maintain this position, it shows me that in five years, we can add another \$13 million to that figure,” he said.

Matulich also presented a budget timeline at the Finance Committee meeting. Following the board’s approval of the Proposition 218 notice mailing at the March 19 meeting, Finance Committee members will review the draft 2025-26 budget, proposed rates and reserves and develop a list of Capital Improvement Projects for the upcoming

year during their April 10 and May 8 meetings. The deadline for submitting rate increase protests is May 21.

The schedule also establishes the first reading of the rate increase ordinance and a presentation of the draft budget for the board’s May 21 meeting.

The second reading of the ordinance and final adoption of the budget would take place at the June 18 board meeting.

This story is online at [therivervalleytimes.com](#) ★

Unexpected Apology About Water Plan at CSD Meeting

Continued from page 1

connect with the district, Maddaus acknowledged that many questions had arisen about their work and stated they were prepared to answer them publicly.

“Dan and I both feel we did valuable work,” she said. “Some of the dialogue we’ve heard isn’t in line with how we did our work, why we did our work, and what we did with the information and data provided.”

Jenco expressed satisfaction when Maddaus said she could attend the committee’s April meeting.

“I’ve been asking that for months now,” he said. “Let’s get Lisa here to answer questions face to face.”

Maddaus suggested that receiving a list of technical questions about the draft Integrated Water Master Plan in advance would help her prepare more thoroughly. She also noted that she and Adkins had already addressed 130 questions. District Secretary Amelia Wilder informed Maddaus that she would be first on the agenda at the April 1



Former Operations Director Michael Fritschi responds to criticism.

Improvements Committee meeting.

Eckard Comments

Janis Eckard, who has harshly criticized past and current water studies, followed Maddaus to the podium.

“I would like to issue a public apology to Lisa Maddaus,” Eckard said. “I’ve been really hard on her through all the times she’s been involved in our water studies.”

“The reason was that there were data inaccuracies and assumptions that were not achievable. But unfortunately, it wasn’t Lisa who generated the data.”

Eckard added that she conveyed that in a letter to Maddaus.

“I told her I would publicly apologize to her for holding her feet to the fire the way I did,” she said.

“I don’t feel her model is bad. It’s the accuracy of

her model I challenge, but that’s because of the data CSD gave her.”

Maddaus responded that she and Adkins were very appreciative of the letter.

Following the meeting, The River Valley Times contacted Eckard to ask who from the district supplied the inaccurate data to the consultants. Eckard confirmed that it was prior Operations Director Michael Fritschi, who resigned in May.

When asked for examples of inaccurate data that ended up in the Integrated Water Master Plan, Eckard cited four issues. First, the projected recycled water supply at full development build-out was overestimated. Second, the existing demand for the water supply was understated. Third, the evaporation and seepage rate was calculated too low due to reliance on a less accurate measuring method. Fourth, the amount of water lost to breaks and leaks was also understated.

Asked how she knew the inaccurate data came

from the Rancho Murieta Community Services District, Eckhard said that Adkins made it clear at a town hall meeting that he and Maddaus hadn’t produced the data used in their study.

“When I sent the apology letter to Dan and Lisa, I told them the reason I ‘held their feet to the fire’ was because they knew the numbers were wrong,” Eckard said in an email. “In my opinion, they had a moral obligation to protect the community, particularly since Rancho Murieta does not have a backup water source and had most likely exceeded the capacity of the system.

“However, Lisa and Dan were paid to follow orders, so the blame belongs with CSD.”

Fritschi Comments

The River Valley Times contacted Fritschi for a response. He said it was unfortunate that some people were challenging the work of good engineers and scientists and their

technical study.

“I tried my best to provide the best data I could and to be as transparent and honest with the community,” he said. “If some of the community doesn’t want to hear the truth, I can’t make them.”

Fritschi said the elephant in the room is growth.


“The issue appears to be that some people do not want to have growth in their community and are using perceived water scarcity as a tool to prevent development.”

Fritschi fears trouble is looming for the district.

“Until the community gets together and honors its covenants with the developers, there could potentially be issues in the future,” he said. “They should be working together to find and secure water supplies and storage solutions.”

Fritschi concluded by saying he wished the Rancho Murieta community the best.

This story is online at [therivervalleytimes.com](#) ★



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Little League Celebrates 34 Years

Continued from page 1

asked the teams and spectators to turn their eyes to the flagpole, where Scout Troop 633 presented the colors. He then asked the audience to join in the National Anthem.

After introducing all the Cosumnes River Little League Board members, Stephens welcomed Dan Reid, this year’s president. Reid expressed his gratitude, saying, “Thank you to the Rancho Murieta community, for the parents, for the volunteers, and especially our board for making this day possible, this season possible.”

The board’s efforts, which began early in September, involved organizing teams, preparing uniforms and readying the fields.

“They put in countless hours, so thank you to the CRLI Board,” Reid said.

Reid also commended the Rancho Murieta Association Maintenance Department staff for their dedication to the ball fields.

“Our fields are incredible,” Reid said. “They are some of the nicest in the district.”

Reid reported that 300 young people are participating this year across 31 teams, the highest number of teams to date.

“We couldn’t be more thrilled to have our programs continue to develop, especially our softball program that now has 10 teams this year,” Reid said. “CRLI is one of the few Little League programs around that has softball.”

Reid emphasized the importance of partnerships with other leagues, especially given the



An elephant leads the way for the Athletics.



Lined up in the backfield, 300 players and their coaches stand respectfully as the National Anthem plays over the loudspeakers.

community’s remote and rural location. These partnerships allow older teams to play at different facilities, with Cosumnes River Little League offering the same in return.

“So be good hosts. Enjoy them and let them see how CRLI and Rancho Murieta do it because this is an incredible field with incredible volunteers, parents and an association that backs us,” Reid said.

Reid also asked for a round of applause for the team managers and coaches.

“They are volunteers who are out here,” Reid said. “They put in the time

and effort to make it happen, and a lot of them are out in the field to make them look beautiful.”

Reid also offered advice to the parents: “Don’t forget to let them manage and coach during the games, and be a spectator.”

He emphasized that Little League is about fun and creating lasting memories for the youth.

“So let them enjoy this experience and be supportive of all the CRLI teams,” Reid told the parents.

Reid also highlighted several improvements this year. He noted that the new website offers excellent features, including the

ability for parents to livestream games and enhanced texting capabilities for announcements, such as field closures.

Reid encouraged the crowd to check out the snack bar upgrades, thanks to a committee led by Mike Martell and Shawn Kassell.

The fields have also seen updates, including a new batting cage, sock nets, batting mats and more improvements that are still coming.

“So we’re really happy about that,” Reid said.

Reid also recognized the league’s sponsors, whose banners were displayed along the outfield wall,



After throwing the first pitch, Mackenzie Lyons, 3 1/2, shares a high-five with John Firenza, 14, under the approving eye of Little League Board President Dan Reid. They represent the youngest and oldest registered players in the league.

the pitcher, while John Firenza, 14, served as the catcher. Although her throw didn’t travel far, it was straight and received applause. John then gave Mackenzie a big high five, marking a heartwarming moment to kick off the season.

“Great job, Mackenzie and John,” Reid said. “So, with that, we are going to get excited.”

Reid then invited everyone to enjoy the nearby barbecue lunch, giving priority in the hot dog line to the teams scheduled to play first.

“Thank you again for supporting CRLI,” Reid concluded. “Let’s play ball!”

Cosumnes River Little League provided the food for the free lunch, while the Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta handled the barbecue. The club members grilled high-quality hot dogs, packaged them in foil with buns and served several hundred diners.

See more photos at river-valleytimes.com. ★

Harrahs
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA



THE
MURIETA
INN AND SPA

SHUTTLE SERVICE

SERVICE DETAILS

THE HOTEL SHALL PROVIDE A BIWEEKLY SHUTTLE SERVICE EVERY OTHER SATURDAY BETWEEN RANCHO MURIETA INN & SPA AND HARRAH'S CASINO. THE SHUTTLE WILL RUN FROM THE RANCHO MURIETA INN AND SPA TO HARRAH'S NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CASINO IN IONE ON THE FOLLOWING SCHEDULE:

**SATURDAY APRIL 12TH
& SATURDAY APRIL 26TH:**

SHUTTLE WILL DEPART RANCHO MURIETA INN AND SPA AT THE FOLLOWING TIMES:

11 AM • 1 PM • 3 PM • 5 PM • 7 PM

SHUTTLE WILL DEPART HARRAHS NORTHERN CALIFORNIA AT THE FOLLOWING TIMES:

12 PM • 2 PM • 4 PM • 6 PM • 8 PM

DEPARTURE POLICY:

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF GUESTS TO BE AT THE DESIGNATED PICKUP LOCATION ON TIME. SPACE IS LIMITED TO 14 GUESTS PER TRIP.

