

County supervisors stay the course on North Davis Meadows water supply

By **Anne Ternus-Bellamy**

New Wells & Treatment vs. Current Project

	Construction Costs	Ongoing Annual O&M
Monitoring Well	\$200,000 ¹	N/A
Two 1,800 ft. Deep Wells	\$4.6-6.6 million ²	\$190,000
Well Head Treatment ³ (two wells required for redundancy; both required to individually meet fire protection requirements)	\$2 million/500 gpm well \$4-8 million/2,000 gpm well	\$80,000/500 gpm well \$150,000/2,000 gpm well
Total Estimated Well-Related Costs	\$10.8-16.8 million ⁴	\$420,000
Current City of Davis Connection Project	\$8.3 million	\$365,750 ⁵

County officials believe a deep-water well project for North Davis Meadows would be costlier than connecting the community to the city of Davis water supply. Courtesy graphic

Yolo County supervisors on Tuesday declined a request by North Davis Meadows residents to hit pause on plans to connect the unincorporated community to the city of Davis water system.

By a vote of 4-1, with Supervisor Duane Chamberlain of the rural Fifth District dissenting, the board instead increased by \$22,000 a contract with West Yost Associates to continue design work on the connection. That increase will actually

lead to cost savings down the line as it is related to design for a reduced fire flow requirement.

Connecting North Davis Meadows' 95 households to the city's water system will result in a substantial increase in water rates for the neighborhood's residents, who will see their water bills increase from \$2,118 to \$6,021 next year and continuing for up to 30 years, to cover infrastructure costs.

The neighborhood currently receives water from two wells that contain excessive levels of nitrates, iron and aluminum, requiring that a new water source be found. Connecting to the city's system would provide each parcel with a water meter for potable water, irrigation and fire-flow needs, and comply with California drinking-water regulations.

Back in March, under an official protest vote required by Proposition 218, 46 of the neighborhood's households protested the rate hike that would come with connecting to the city's water system, just short of the 48 needed to prevent the increase.

But some residents say a majority of households now oppose the connection and had asked the Board of Supervisors to allow a new Proposition 218 vote — this time for residents to tax themselves to pay for an exploratory deep water well to determine if new deep water wells could provide all of their water needs instead.

In a letter to the board last week, North Davis Meadows resident Dr. Michael Wilkes said many local and regional experts have confirmed that there is a high likelihood — but no guarantee — that a new deep water well, when combined with existing wells, can supply healthy water that meets current and future safety standards.

“We have also been given strong assurance that the water supply ... is ample to meet current demands for 100 years,” Wilkes said.

Residents themselves would pay to drill an exploratory well, Wilkes noted — a cost the county put at about \$200,000.

Many North Davis Meadows residents showed up to Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting with most — though not all — echoing Wilkes' request that the county pause current efforts to connect the neighborhood to the city water system while the feasibility of a deep water well can be explored instead.

Only Chamberlain appeared inclined to support that request.

Supervisor Don Saylor of Davis noted that research by county staff since that March protest vote has led him to conclude that connecting the neighborhood to the city of Davis water system is the only solution.

Saylor reiterated comments he made earlier this summer in a letter he sent North Davis Meadows residents after numerous community meetings that included city and county staff as well as residents.

“Yolo County staff and I engaged in this assessment period willing to change course if given a viable solution with substantial consensus to support the project financially,” he said.

“As I’ve learned more through this process, I don’t see a viable long-term alternative to the approved project. An exploratory well is not a solution – it is simply a point in time assessment of one well location (two will be needed) and an option that has many unknowns and risks. I can’t recommend that Yolo County embrace a short-term strategy to address long-term public health and safety needs.”

Meanwhile, Beth Gabor, the county’s manager of operations and strategy, said a delay in connecting the neighborhood to the city’s water system would be costly, both in terms of increasing construction costs as well as a higher interest rate on the money the county would borrow to finance the project and which then would be paid back by North Davis Meadows residents.

“Pausing the project will only increase the cost of the project and increase the interest rate,” she said.

Supervisor Oscar Villegas of West Sacramento commended Saylor for his efforts looking into alternative solutions and agreed that staying the course “is the responsible thing to do.”

“It’s not the popular thing to do but oftentimes the popular thing to do is not the responsible thing to do,” Villegas said.

Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis also noted that “the community is divided,” but said, “there’s risks either way, and potential big expenses either way, but the risks of not going forward with the city water is probably the least.”

At Provenza’s request, county staff will continue to look into ways to assist North Davis Meadows residents — particularly those on fixed incomes — who need financial help paying their higher water bills.

Meanwhile, one option to reduce those bills in the future — by using well water for irrigation — remains a possibility, noted Saylor and others.

“Staying the course of full consolidation to meet public health and safety needs does not prevent the community from evaluating other options to identify lower-cost irrigation solutions,” Saylor said.

“For example, residents could explore individual ag wells on their property. Residents could also look into converting one of the existing wells into an irrigation-only well and new irrigation connections to homes either underground or an alternative solution.”

— Reach Anne Ternus-Bellamy at aternus@davisenterprise.net. Follow her on Twitter at [@ATernusBellamy](https://twitter.com/ATernusBellamy).