

Indian Creek Westridge Community Services District

Agenda Board of Directors meeting

Tuesday August 9, 2022 at 6:00PM at the Christian Science church at the corner of W. Line St and Grandview Dr., Bishop, CA 93514

Call to order-Luis Elias

Old Business:

Approval of minutes from regular meeting of 5/10/2022

O&M report-Don Buser

Finance report: Quarterly, revised annual budget, current Capital expenditures-Terry Tye

OVGA update-Luis Elias, Ted Williams

New business:

Fairview fire report

Wildrose fire hydrant project

Fire and Water

With the tragedy of the Fairview fire fresh in our minds I thought it appropriate to comment on the number one weapon that firefighters rely on to fight fire, water. In conversations I've had with firefighters and the fire chief it is clear that the lack of adequate water supplies at the beginning of the fire may have made the outcome worse, possibly resulting in the loss of homes that could have been saved.

As the manager of a local public water system, Indian Creek Westridge Community Services District (ICWCSD), I can speak to the heroic efforts of the firefighters involved that day, 7/8/2022. When I became aware of the fire and its location I made my way out to the District. Upon arrival I found multiple fire trucks filling their tanks from our fire hydrant in front of Manor Market. There were trucks waiting their turn to fill so they were directed to other nearby hydrants to expedite filling and get them back on scene to assist with the fight. While it is not possible to determine the exact amount of water that ICWCSD provided that day, I estimate that it could be around 500,000 gallons.

The neighborhood where the fire occurred did not have a water system in the traditional sense. I believe they relied primarily on private wells. There were no fire hydrants. The firefighters quickly exhausted the water supplies that they brought with them and had to back off from the fire and wait for backup water supplies to be brought in from hydrants outside the neighborhood.

This is not an unusual situation in our community. Most small water systems suffer from inadequate budgets and many lack trained certified water operators. Many systems rely on volunteer residents to operate and maintain their systems. Many do not have enough money in the bank to meet their annual operating budgets let alone financing for capital improvements like fire hydrants. This is a set up for future catastrophic loss of homes, other infrastructure and potentially life due to fire.

So what can we do? There is a variety of water system governing structures. County, municipal, community service districts, mutual water companies, private for profit enterprises are some examples. Except for the private systems all the others should have a governance board structure. These boards (county supervisors, city councils, Board of Directors) all provide the opportunity for public comment and input. Attendance at these meetings and the provision of your opinion are critical. Ask what is being done to protect you from fire. Ask about the budget and available capital funds. Demand accountability from these boards, councils and commissions when it comes to protecting your assets and welfare. Consider volunteering your time to help maintain and improve your water system.

The ICWCSD may be better equipped to maintain and improve our system due to the size of our District (297 connections, population~1030). But size alone does not account for our success. Our Board of Directors has approved and imposed two painful rate increases on our customers in the last nine years. In 2018 we raised our rates by 50%. The foresight of the Board and the revenue that these increases generated allowed us to accomplish major system improvements, many focused specifically on increasing our ability to supply water for fire suppression. In the last twelve years we have spent over \$500,000 on capital improvements. The projects focused on fire suppression have cost over \$300,000.

We charge our customers \$74.00 per month for water. Twenty dollars of that goes to our Capital Improvement Fund generating about \$72,000 per year for capital projects. Many small systems are not charging enough for their services and are chronically in the red because of it. Rate increases are never popular but they are necessary periodically. Grant funding is another source of revenue but obtaining grant money is difficult and very time consuming. When you apply for a grant there is no guarantee that you will be successful. If you want to pursue a grant contact the USDA, the California Department of Water Resources or the State Water Resources Control Board.

I would like to join with others that have offered thanks to all the firefighters that responded from multiple jurisdictions to assist with the Fairview firefighting effort. My own brother was a firefighter for 30 years so I know the difficulties and danger that you face every day. I offer my condolences to all those that lost their homes, personal belongings, livestock and pets in this terrible incident.

The ICWCSD, recognizing a deficiency in the distribution of fire hydrants in our own system, embarked this last month on correcting that deficiency. We installed a new fire hydrant (making 27 total hydrants in our system) on Wildrose Rd. It was a difficult project because the water main that we tapped into is in the back yard necessitating running a pipeline across private property to the street. This would not have been possible without the cooperation of the homeowners on either side of the pipeline. Special thanks to Tom and Rita Wheat and Derrick Olson for granting us access to their property and providing an easement to ICWCSD. Their participation and commitment to their community allowed the project to go forward and improve our fire suppression capabilities.