

DC commissioners waffle on water decisions



Douglas County residents are not happy with how the electeds are handling water issues at the lake. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Water issues brought out the masses to Thursday's Douglas County Commission meeting in Stateline.

People are not happy with the prospect of rates going up as much as 50 percent and the county's going back on its June decision to consolidate water companies.

So many residents were at the Oct. 16 meeting that they didn't fit into the room and had to stand in the lobby area of the county administrative building. The meeting, which started at 1:30pm, did not get over until after 9pm.

The districts affected are Zephyr Water Utility District, Cave Rock/Uppaway and Skyland – all at Lake Tahoe.

Residents thought everything was a done deal because in June the commissioners approved rates to go up and for consolidation. The idea was that combining maintenance and operation expenses would be more cost-effective. Debt, though, would have remained separate.

One enterprise fund has been created for the districts, but the county is keeping separate accounting departments for each system.

Consolidation of the water systems is now off the table indefinitely.

“ZWUD did a special assessment of \$7,500 per parcel some years ago, thus the systems have too much difference in their infrastructure needs as well as current debt and operational/maintenance costs to do consolidation now,” Commissioner Nancy McDermid told *Lake Tahoe News*.

But it’s not like the commissioners didn’t know about the special assessment in June.

At the meeting McDermid said consolidation could be revisited.

On Thursday the commissioners unanimously approved ZWUD rates to increase. Monthly rates will go from \$79.95 to \$99.91 starting Nov. 1. This 25 percent increase will remain in effect for the next two years. The other water rate items were for discussion, with no vote being taken.

“We will be coming back to them with proposed rates based on the info they provided,” County Manager Jim Nichols told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Cave Rock has retained legal counsel.

“Cave Rock Water System likely will sue if this isn’t resolved correctly,” a customer at the meeting told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The county previously voted for consolidation, but now is changing its mind. We already are paying more than \$200 a

month and they want to increase that.”

Cave Rock customers support total consolidation.

A letter to the commission from the law firm Kaempfer Crowell in Reno says, “Through consolidation and an appropriate ratemaking process, the long-term viability of CRWS and the county’s other water systems can be ensured. Moreover, consolidation will allow the county to budget for and spread the costs of infrastructure overhauls over the long term and over the entire county.”

Lake Tahoe water district issues will continue to be on future commission agendas.