

MEDIA RELEASE

HUMBOLDT BAY MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT

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Contact: Carol Rische, General Manager, Phone: 707-443-5018 or gm@hbmwd.com

Water District Wins Grant for Public Engagement Process

The Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District learned Wednesday it would receive a \$7,500 grant from Common Sense California in support of the local effort to engage citizens in long-term planning around Humboldt County water rights and rates.

It was one of six grantees chosen from among 35 applications in the first phase of the grant program and one of four to receive the maximum award.

“It’s a stamp of approval; a testament to the innovative process we are about to undertake,” said Kaitlin Sopoci-Belknap, president of the HBMWD board of directors. “It’s a different and exciting approach that we hope will become a magnet for other funding.”

“We’re grateful that they see the importance of the process and its potential for solving what could be a difficult issue in Humboldt County,” HBMWD board member Bruce Rupp said.

Common Sense California executive director Pete Peterson said his organization seeks to encourage a connection between policy makers and the public by supporting groups that seek to engage the public with legitimate options rather than lobby it with pre-determined decisions.

Also important: funding issues of interest to other California municipalities.

“Water policy certainly qualifies,” Peterson said. “Originating in the water district, this effort shows an inside-out approach to civic engagement, which, from our experience, creates a better chance of public involvement affecting policy. We are encouraged that the water district wants to get the informed opinion of their customers.”

HBMWD delivers drinking water to approximately 80,000 people in Arcata, Blue Lake and Eureka and the community service districts of Fieldbrook-Glendale, Humboldt, Manila and McKinleyville.

HBMWD is faced with a shrunken customer base from the closure of the pulp mills, tens of millions of dollars in infrastructure needs in the next 20 years, and the threat of losing the water it does not put to beneficial use.

In response, HBMWD embarked on a two-year project to educate and engage municipal customers and the broader community in a long-term planning effort known as FLOW – Frank Language about Our Water.

The third phase of the FLOW civic engagement process is scheduled for next month. The public is invited to learn about the district and share its input about the criteria to be considered in determining recommendations.

Interested citizens should attend one of the following meetings: October 13 at Azalea Hall in McKinleyville, October 14 in the Senior Room at the Arcata Community Center, and October 22 at the Wharfinger Building in Eureka.

The meetings start at 6 p.m.

Other \$7,500 grantees were: the city of San Pablo to support the development of a main road; Sonoma County to create its strategic plan; and Sutter County to address gang issues.

Receiving \$5,000 grants were: the Pleasanton Chamber of Commerce to address the housing element in the city's general plan and San Diego Common Cause for discussions about the continuation of its "strong mayor" form of government.

Trinidad's Mary Gelinis, managing director of consulting firm Gelinis James, Inc., is guiding the HBMWD engagement process as a consultant.

Gelinis and partner Roger James specialize in creating meaningful public conversations and collaborations for complex, comprehensive change.

They are on the faculty for the locally-based Cascadia Center for Leadership.

Phase two of the public engagement process began Wednesday night at the Wharfinger with the first meeting of the Citizen Study Group.

Approximately 30 stakeholders coming from real estate, organized labor, business, the Chamber of Commerce, economic development, fisheries and watershed management, environment, and the Blue Lake Rancheria joined with 20 randomly selected citizens to learn about the issues facing the district and suggest decision-making criteria.

Also in the works: a day-long water symposium and additional rounds of public and Citizen Study Group meetings to generate and evaluate options.

Recommendations are expected to be determined by next summer.

To learn more about the flow of water, rates, and ideas, go to www.hbmwd.com. Scroll near the bottom of the page and click on Water Resources Planning.