

## **Santa Cruz City Council passes new landscape irrigation provisions**

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**By J.M. Brown**

The City Council on Tuesday passed stricter measures for landscape water use in future housing developments.

The changes to current rules cover single-family homes with landscaped areas over 2,500 square feet, as well as new landscaping put in during renovations of current developments. Existing homes or businesses that have less than an acre of developed landscaping would not be affected.

Plans must be submitted to the city for any new single-family homes where the total landscaped area will be more than 2,500 square feet and installed by the developer, or for single- and dual-unit projects built on properties larger than 10,000 square feet. Turf will no longer be permitted on slopes greater than 5 percent and developments covered under the rules would have to provide sensor-based irrigation controllers.

The new rules could lead to a reduction of at least 10 percent in landscape water use.

Also Tuesday, several city employees represented by the Service Employees International Union asked the council to spare workers from further pay cuts. The union represents 485 employees, or about 60 percent of the city's total labor force, who work in water, sanitation, parking and other departments.

Doris Henry, a union representative, said longer furloughs for service-level workers "will weaken essential government." She noted that the City Council recently decided to fill eight police positions, saying, "If you want to add money to their

budget, don't do it at our expense."

Mayor Mike Rotkin sought to remind residents that the council elected to fill the vacant police slots out of deep concern for public safety following several homicides and a \$100,000 vandalism spree downtown. City officials are bargaining with employee groups for concessions on next year's budget, and the council has until late June to pass the budget.

Also Tuesday, the council honored Fire Capt. Lono Barnes and engineer Ward Walters with County Emergency Lifesaving Awards for recently rescuing a drowning man in rough waters.

"These folks did something far beyond," Fire Chief Ron Oliver told the council.

## **Lompico water district could merge with SLV water**

By GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER

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SAN LORENZO VALLEY -- The leaders of Lompico's beleaguered water district have asked the San Lorenzo Valley Water District to look into taking over the small agency's operations permanently.

"We were approached by the board of directors of Lompico County Water District to examine possible alternatives for Lompico County Water District," said Jim Mueller, director of San Lorenzo Valley Water District. "We're in the process of looking at those alternatives right now."

Mueller said he does not know when his water district might begin working with Lompico, saying that decision is up to the smaller agency's board of directors. Instead, he said, he was asked to explore either contracting operations of the Lompico district or assuming it as part of the greater valley district, in which case the Lompico agency would dissolve.

"There are only two alternatives," Mueller said. "One would be they contract with San Lorenzo to manage and operate their system. The second one would be to become part of SLV."

The request comes after the struggling Lompico County Water District recently fired its executive director for "mismanagement" and lost its secretary after police arrested her on charges of stealing money from the district. The former manager, Michael Eggleston, is not accused of any crime.

Officials with Lompico County Water District could not be reached to comment.

The agency also is under investigation by the Santa Cruz grand jury for higher-than-average water rates, and received a \$45,000 loan from the county this week to help keep operations stable. The grand jury report is due in June.

The Lompico district serves 1,500 people, while the San Lorenzo Valley district serves about 19,560 people.

County Auditor-Controller Mary Jo Walker said she recommended supervisors approve the \$45,000 loan for the Lompico district under a program regularly used by schools and fire departments, where agencies borrow from the county against property taxes that will be paid to them later in the year.

"Lompico County Water District is going through some tough times, and asked to participate in this program. I would expect it to last just a year or two until they get financially stable," Walker said in an e-mail.

Meanwhile, the Lompico district's former secretary, Marinda Frances Kelly, 39, of Scotts Valley was arraigned Monday after she was arrested last month on one charge of grand theft, said investigator Mike Roe. The ongoing grand jury investigation discovered and reported the alleged crime.

Kelly allegedly began taking money from the district in the summer of 2008 and continued into 2009, according to county investigators. A recent audit of water department books found about \$4,900 missing.

Kelly will be back in court June 7, Roe said.