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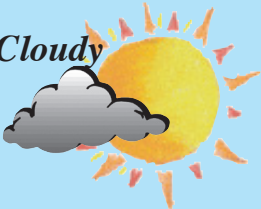
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Partly Cloudy

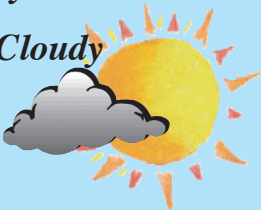
66°



Saturday

Partly Cloudy

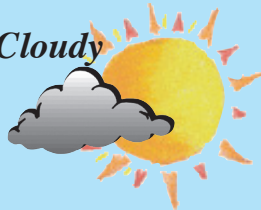
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Sunday

Partly Cloudy

65°



Almost Time for the Holidays



Photo by Rob Fiore

Water Rates to Rise as Protest Falls Short

By Brian Simon

The community doth protest, but in this case not too much. That was apparent on Tuesday night as the El Segundo City Council approved a water rate increase over the next five years after less than one-third of affected parcel owners returned ballots opposing the move. Majority protest was needed to squelch the rate hike.

On August 4, a consultant told the Council that in light of rising costs and an ongoing drought, the City must significantly increase both capacity (fixed costs and emergency monies) and consumption charges on local water bills or else face a \$3.6 million revenue loss. Under those initial recommendations, which detailed annual hikes through 2014/15, the average single family water bill would have swelled from \$31.18 to \$44.28.

During that discussion, Council asked staff to add consumption tiers to the proposed rate structure to incentivize potable water conservation and create more savings possibilities. Of two new options presented on September 1, the Council favored an eight-tiered rate structure that actually reduces fixed rates (seen as a more fair arrangement for low-end users) while increasing consumption charges. Under this option, the average single family water bill will only jump to \$36.64, an amount still lower than any of the surrounding agencies. According to projections for this scenario, the City’s water enterprise fund will be self-sustaining and even generate \$188,000 in reserves.

As mandated by Proposition 218, the Council could not implement the increase without giving affected parties a chance to nix it. The City mailed out 5,200 ballots to local property owners and/or water users (each parcel got one vote) on September 15, giving them more than the required 45-day notification period to fill in and return paperwork protesting the hike. By Monday afternoon, the City Clerk’s office had only received 1,534 ballots. There would be no last-minute flurry. Only 14 more came in on Tuesday, including one during the Council meeting, for a final total of 1,548 — well short

of the 2,601 minimum majority needed to stop the rate increase.

“We’re sorry this is necessary,” said Mayor Kelly McDowell, who promised an “aggressive public outreach program” to teach people how to conserve water and hopefully save some money in the process. A key component of the plan will be to disseminate information through the local school system so that kids can bring home conservation tips and information to their parents. McDowell listed California’s declining share of Colorado River water compared to other states, a court ruling reducing the availability of Sacramento Delta water in order to protect an endangered species of smelt, and the state’s three-year drought as the key reasons why the City’s own water rates continue to jump.

While acknowledging the higher percentage

of returned protest ballots than usual, Mayor Pro Tem Eric Busch said City services could have been threatened had a majority ruled. “This would have taken \$4 million out of the budget this year, more next year and more the next year,” he explained. “We’re just trying to pass the cost through so the City doesn’t just eat that cost.” Busch added that the chosen eight-tiered option provides flexibility and encourages more people to conserve. Also, those who use the least amount of water won’t see much of an increase.

Final adoption of the rate increase is scheduled for November 17. Water bills will go up starting in January.

Gaines to Receive Memorial at New Fire Station

The City will dedicate a flag pole at the soon-to-be-completed Fire Station 2

See City Council, page 7

Fire Station 2 Just About Ready to Roll

By Brian Simon

El Segundo is finally about to have a new fire station and it only had to wait 30 years or so to get it done. Barring inclement weather or any unforeseen glitches, construction on the long-awaited new Fire Station 2 will wrap up on November 20, according to local officials. A grand opening ceremony will likely take place the following week. “We’re hoping some of our firefighters can have Thanksgiving dinner there,” said City of El Segundo Principal Engineer and Fire Station 2 Project Manager Maryam Jonas.

Situated on a one-acre site at Campus El Segundo on Mariposa Avenue and Nash Street, the new \$7.8 million station will replace a more than 50-year old structure on El Segundo Boulevard. The two-story,

state-of-the-art facility will include such amenities as a training room, back-up emergency operations center, a new computerized dispatch system, meeting and office space, recreation and fitness areas, a workshop, and 10 separate living spaces (nine personnel will set up shop initially) with individual restrooms to account for mixed gender occupancy. The large open floor space will be able to accommodate future need for additional or larger apparatuses.

While actual work on the facility kicked off a little over a year ago, talk of the project itself goes back decades to the time of the Carter administration when then-El Segundo Fire Department personnel realized it might be time for a station upgrade. This has remained at

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