

Mount Shasta Herald

News

McCloud water negotiations questioned

By Deborra Clayton
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The water forum hosted by the McCloud Water Commons on November 13th was held in part for the purpose of sharing information about the process and contract specifics of the proposed McCloud Nestlé water bottling facility, according to forum participant Nancy Price.

A member of the Water Allies Network who serves as coordinator for the western alliance "Water for Life," Price said she was referred to the group by Mount Shasta resident Meadow Barr.

Price has helped mentor MWC through their efforts to focus community attention on the potential impacts of the Nestlé project and the way negotiations were undertaken.

"This contract was negotiated behind closed doors," said MWC member Lori Vance.

MCSD general manager Pete Kampa said it was public knowledge for seven years that the district was negotiating with water companies before Nestlé came to the table.

Referring to the Nestlé negotiations themselves, Kampa said they were posted on the district agenda as a closed session item for four meetings between June and September so the public could come to the open comment period and ask questions.

At one meeting he gave a verbal report on the status of the proposed contract negotiations in open session and at another announced that a proposal was expected in late September or early October, Kampa reported.

Nestlé Waters NA natural resource manager Dave Palais said two toll free numbers were published in the Mount Shasta Herald for the first time in October 2003 and a web site was published in December 2003 to give the public an avenue to express their comments and concerns directly to Nestlé.

He said he had attended two public question and answer sessions to which he had been invited by McCloud citizens.

"I'm surprised some people claim the process has been conducted secretly, given all the public district meetings regarding water sales before Nestlé was in the picture and the opportunities we've offered the public for inquiry and comment since we've been involved," Palais said.

Price said it is possible that for awhile the McCloud district and its citizens were focusing on just the economic aspect of the proposed project, including the creation of jobs and the economic potential for their area.

But even during that time, MWC members say, there were people in McCloud who began expressing concerns about the extent of the proposed project and the decision to approve it at the close of the first public meeting called specifically to hear community responses and concerns.

Price said, "I think it took awhile for people to find each other and come forward."

"Five or six people made a decision for 1300 people about so many things that would affect all of us for 99 years," Vance said.

Both Price and MWC members point to the large turn-out at the forum as an indication of people's concern about the proposed project and their desire to both be informed and be part of the process.

Vance reported that at least 400 specific comments were generated by forum attendees and delivered to the county for inclusion in the Environmental Impact Report currently underway under the California Environmental Quality Act.

MWC member Debra Anderson expressed a core concern for many McCloud citizens when she said to those gathered at the forum, "If McCloud hands over our water rights for 100 years to a foreign company, we owe it to our children's children to know the facts."

Both Kampa and director Rich Toreson, board chair at the time, said it is a common misconception that the district sold water rights to Nestlé.

"Everyone keeps bringing up water rights, but water rights were not even a consideration. Nestlé will buy water like every other customer in town," said Toreson.

Kampa said he feels strongly that government agencies should maintain control over their water and should not sell water sources or water rights to private companies.

"This was a core concept in the negotiations and we did not waver," Kampa said.