

OPINION > COMMENTARY

Bruce Delgado, guest commentary: Coastal Commission should deny Cal Am appeal

By **BRUCE DELGADO** |

PUBLISHED: October 28, 2019 at 12:57 p.m. | UPDATED: October 28, 2019 at 2:53 p.m.

About eight years ago, our neighboring cities on the Monterey Peninsula and a private, for-profit water company, California American Water, made a sweet deal that defies environmental justice. To overdevelop their water supply and their profits, Cal Am has been pushing for a groundwater (not ocean water) desalination project under Marina's sand dunes that would pose major risks to the local groundwater basin and environmentally sensitive habitat.

Ironically, the desal project's seven extraction wells are slated to be located on the same beach location in which Marina, the California Coastal Commission and State Lands Commission — recognizing the need to protect the sensitive native environment — successfully negotiated a 2020 closure of the nation's last remaining coastal sand mining operation to return the area to its natural condition.

The extraction wells in question would not only threaten the groundwater under Marina, but its air quality, Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas, the visual aesthetics of its dune system and the public's access to Marina beaches. And remember this, the city of Marina and former Fort Ord communities wouldn't get a drop of the Cal Am desalinated water.

In return for this raw deal, wealthy enclaves like Carmel and Monterey would get quantities of water far beyond their needs, and Cal Am would get their profits.

So, Marina, the "host" city, is opposing the drilling project – and the Marina Planning Commission denied Cal Am's permit application.



Now Cal Am, with support of big business, is appealing Marina's decision to the Coastal Commission and the appeal will be considered at their Nov. 14 meeting. The Cal Am "deal" ignores science, common-sense alternatives, and the state's commitment to social fairness. For the following three reasons the Coastal Commission should support Marina's permit denial and put an end to this unnecessary project, once and for all:

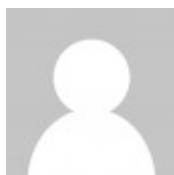
First, the deal ignores a Stanford University study that found the drilling operation could breach freshwater located below the proposed drilling site and exasperate seawater intrusion. It is inconceivable Marina's water supply should be risked for the profit of Cal Am. As an alternative exists, providing needed water for the Peninsula is no longer Cal Am's objective. Without regard for the public interests, Cal Am pushes forward in 2019 with its preeminent goal – corporate profits.

Second, while the dealmakers continue to pursue a drilling permit, responsible citizens on the Monterey Peninsula have already built a water recycling plant called Pure Water Monterey. Pure Water Monterey doesn't require drilling on the coastline and expanding the project's capacity would meet the region's water needs at least for decades according to a 2019 report funded by the Monterey Water Management District. Pure Water Monterey deserves priority consideration by all parties, but especially by the Coastal Commission which has worked so diligently to protect the state's coastline and natural resources.

Finally, it is unconscionable that Marina was so easily sacrificed in the deal-making. The city doesn't have the wealth or power of its neighbors, but it is a community of hard-working residents who oppose the deal.

The Coastal Commission has never shied away from making critically important policy decisions, which is why it is one of the state's most respected agencies. To avoid becoming a party to the "Marina raw deal," the Commission must uphold Marina's right to protect its coastline and all Monterey Bay residents — and deny the Cal Am appeal.

Bruce Delgado is the mayor of Marina.



Bruce

Delgado



