

Martin McIntyre: Recharge Fresno is right for our community

By Martin
McIntyre

A safe reliable water supply is the lifeblood of every community. Without it we simply cannot have healthy families or a vibrant economy.

I have managed water resources for urban and agricultural communities for over 30 years. During that time, too many plans have collapsed because decision makers could not muster the courage to make tough choices about water rates and necessary investments in water security. Fresno now has a great opportunity to rewrite that history. But, make no mistake, failure to do so would be calamitous.

Too bad some people have willfully distorted the issues and hijacked the debate for personal political gain. Recharge Fresno is no half-baked “boondoggle” as disingenuously alleged by some.

Recharge Fresno is, in fact, almost identical to the water management plan developed and endorsed 25 years ago by Fresno County, Clovis, Fresno Metropolitan Flood Control District, Fresno Irrigation District and the city of Fresno. Every unbiased, professional analysis of our community’s water needs has landed in the same place. It is the lack of will to implement that has pushed our community to the current precarious brink.

It’s not as though we have to search for a solution. We already have it: We have surface water rights we can’t fully use. A recent argument asserting that Pine Flat and Millerton lakes are inadequate to meet city needs is simply not true. The problem is that we cannot use our contracted share of that supply due to lack of our own infrastructure to deliver and use our water.

It is our stored groundwater that has been misused. We are responsible, not someone else. Our neglect has been overreliance on groundwater and failure to make adequate use of our water from Millerton and Pine Flat. We have been draining our groundwater and not refilling Fresno’s most important reservoir, the one that lies right beneath our feet. Recharge Fresno will assure us a safe secure water supply and start refilling our dwindling groundwater.

If we could actually see what is happening, if it were a lake we could observe, the 100-foot drop would have stirred us to action long ago. But we can’t see it, so the steady decline has continued. It is increasingly difficult to secure an adequate supply of water in California. Up and down the Valley, communities are running out of water. Growing competition for limited water supplies will be a hallmark of the next decade.

And here we are in Fresno, with the solution right at hand. Our water supply resources are the envy of cities all over the state. We just need to make the necessary investments.

Fresnans have done a great job conserving, but we simply cannot conserve our way out of groundwater contamination, drought, statewide competition, insufficient infrastructure, new legislation and dwindling groundwater supplies. It just cannot be done.

Too expensive? False argument. Drinking water is still the best deal around. And let’s not pretend that there will be no fiscal consequences if we don’t fix our system. Nobody wants to raise utility rates and too often, we have not. The good news is that at the end of the day, after Recharge Fresno is fully implemented, our water rates will still be among the very lowest in California.

Let the state save us, you say? Here’s the cold, hard truth. State law says we must comply with Safe Drinking Water Act standards and stop groundwater overdraft. State agencies have already told us that they are very concerned about the consequences if we fail to implement an adequate water plan. While the state can help, we must invest in

our own water system.

The appropriate utility rate is the rate that can provide a community with a safe, sustainable water supply system. We don't have that. We need to get to it. Do not be misled by the disinformation of those who seek political gain from this most critical debate.

Fortunately, we have a mayor and City Council members who are willing to support a plan that will assure our community has a safe reliable water supply. The citizens of Fresno should support the plan and all the elected officials willing to do what is best for our community.

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