

A CITIZEN RESPONDS

As you may recall:

Back in May, the **City of Yelm issued a baffling MDNS** (Mitigated Determination of Non-Significance) for an incomplete and unapproved draft Water Mitigation Plan -

IN WHICH IT DETERMINED

- that a proposed five-fold increase in pumping City water "will not have a probable significant adverse environmental impact on the local aquifer".

JZ Knight bought space for a full page ad in this newspaper to alert citizens to the City's failure to protect the local aquifer and to provide a reasonable opportunity for citizen input.

JZ Knight, the Squaxin Island Indian Tribe, and the Yelm Aquifer Preservation Society have appealed the MDNS. Over 100 comment letters were written by citizens - all opposing the City's improper MDNS.

This newspaper used copious amounts of space in its May 22nd and May 29th editions to publish the City's misleading comments and disparaging remarks about citizens who speak out against improper and unlawful City conduct:

AND NOW

JZ Knight buys space, yet again, to set the record straight - as follows:

The City of Yelm Says ...

City of Yelm called a newspaper ad a "scare tactic" and "attack." NVN, 5/22/2009

City officials said the ad contained inaccurate and partial information, including claims the City used taxpayer money to fund a water study for Thurston Highlands, and that the City is increasing water rates to accommodate the master planned community.

"If we don't get new water rights, everything shuts down, not just Thurston Highlands."

Badger said the study needed to be conducted regardless of Thurston Highlands, but that the Highlands can't be left out because it is inside city limits.

The City complains that it is unfair for citizens to comment on the environmental impacts of the last phase of a 30-year water plan. "They're making it sound like the impact is tomorrow."

City officials said the 23-foot drop in well levels cited by Knight in her ad is taken from an early model run examining what would happen if the city switched all wells to the southwest field. That model showed water in the well field area could drop 10 and 23 feet.

Badger said nobody can make an accurate, blanket statement like "wells could drop 23 feet," because they'd have to know where other people's wells are drawn and obtain all individual well logs.

As for the accusation that the city is raising water rates to accommodate Thurston Highlands, Yelm Project Manager Stephanie Ray said the Highlands wasn't included in the six-year water plan because the City doesn't anticipate any construction on the project for the next six years.

The City had three choices of how to explore impact including the MDNS or EIS, Beck said. "We'd be doing all the same studies if we'd done the EIS."

While working on the water system plan, the City held three open houses, Ray said.

"We're very open to questions about the work we're doing," Badger said. "We're very willing to talk to (customers)."

[5/29/09 NVN edition]

Project Manager Stephanie Ray said the City will need to drill a new well regardless of the master planned community.

Yelm Community Development Director Grant Beck said he wasn't surprised by the flood of comments or the fact that they were all pretty similar.

"They all read the ad," Beck said. "They didn't appear to have read the MDNS."

The TRUTH is ...

The information in JZ Knight's full-page ad was taken directly from the City's own studies. Informing the public about the City's approach to water planning should not be labeled as "attacks" or "scare tactics."

Nothing in the ad was "inaccurate" or "partial." The water mitigation plan was paid for entirely by the City and saved the Thurston Highlands developer hundreds of thousands of dollars in EIS costs for that project. The City's own studies show that massive water rate increases are necessary to pay for future water system improvements. The City just adopted a 60 percent increase in water rates for 2009. Huge future water rate increases will be needed to pay for \$71 million in water system improvements needed to serve the Thurston Highlands development.

This is true. The City is out of water and needs new water rights for any future growth. The City finally admits what JZ Knight has been saying for years.

The water mitigation plan was required because the City proposes massive groundwater withdrawals from the local aquifer, mostly to serve the proposed Thurston Highlands development. Citizens are not opposed to a proper water mitigation plan. They are opposed to the City's "short-cut" approach - an inadequate water mitigation plan. An environmental impact statement should be required.

Why is it "unfair" for citizens to comment on any portion of the City's water plan? The City's water mitigation plan is a 30-year plan that includes all phases of the proposed Thurston Highlands project (over 5,000 new homes and over 1 million square feet of commercial space). This is the public's ONLY chance to comment on all future environmental impacts caused by the City's proposed 5-fold increase in pumping of the local aquifer over the next 30 years. The City is responsible for all impacts to private water supplies during the next 30 years. The City cannot be allowed to ignore major environmental impacts just because they will not occur "tomorrow."

Exactly. The City's own engineering reports confirm that the City intends to move all of its wells to the southwest field and show that the effect of this move will be to draw down local well levels by 10-23 feet - perhaps more.

That's the point. The City failed to study the environmental impact on local, private wells that will result from the City's proposed 5-fold increase in City pumping of the local aquifer. The City is legally required to evaluate these impacts.

The City is attempting to hide facts from the public. The City's own water plan clearly shows that at least \$71 million in water system improvements will be needed to serve the Thurston Highlands development. These costs will be charged to water system customers.

Not true. The City didn't do an adequate study nor did it give citizens the opportunities to review and comment that an EIS would afford. Not a single comment was submitted in support of the City's incomplete "short-cut" approach.

This is misleading - open house meetings were given for public review of the Water System Plan - all the while, the Water Mitigation Plan was being kept unpublished and hidden from the public. There had never been an open house or other public forum to review the City's Water Mitigation Plan or the MDNS.

Really? Citizens who raise legitimate concerns about the City's planning for future water needs should be prepared to be accused of "scare tactics" and "attacks."

The issue is not drilling one new well. The Issue is the environmental impact of a 5-fold increase in the City's pumping of the local aquifer.

If Mr. Beck wasn't surprised, he must have known the public would be outraged by the City's failure to require an environmental impact statement. Every one of the 100 citizen comment letters opposed the City's "short-cut" approach to the review of the City's plan for a 5-fold increase in the City's pumping of the local aquifer.

There's something wrong when a City official assumes that citizens can't or don't read. The MDNS comment letters showed that (1) citizens understand the issues and (2) citizens do not trust that the City of Yelm will protect their interests regarding the City's future water supply.