

Shape Our Fremont

Where Fremont residents can learn about shaping proposed housing developments...

Issues: How Does New Housing Affect Water Service?

The Alameda County Water District (ACWD) provides water services to Fremont, Union City, and Newark. In 1995, the district implemented a process known as Integrated Resources Planning (IRP) to evaluate and balance the water demand with the water supply to meet future requirements for both new housing and new businesses.

Planning for the Future

As part of the IRP process, ACWD makes long-range forecasts of water demands by combining current usage with projected growth based on each city's General Plan and the Association of Bay Area Governments Smart Growth predictions. They also promote water conservation as a means of managing overall demand. Since 1992, new state laws requiring more water-efficient toilets, faucets, and showers have reduced water demand by 4.6 million gallons per day in the ACWD service area. Public education programs and voluntary changes in landscaping and personal water-use practices have reduced it another 3.2 million gallons a day.

In addition to managing water demand, ACWD makes long-range plans for water supplies. Currently the district gets most of its water from local sources, such as the Alameda Creek watershed, and from the State Water Project, which taps into water from the Sacramento Delta. A smaller portion is purchased from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission's Hetch Hetchy reservoir in the Central Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Starting in 1996, ACWD began diverting any excess water from the State Water Project into the Semitropic Groundwater Bank in Kern County where it is stored underground until needed. More locally, the Newark Desalination Facility was placed in operation in 2003 to remove salt contamination from ACWD fresh water wells near the San Francisco Bay to produce up to 10 million gallons per day of high-quality water.

And finally, to make sure that very large new developments will not have a negative effect on all this planning, the State of California requires a city to obtain a Water Supply Assessment from ACWD for every proposed development that exceeds 500 housing units and/or a certain number of square feet of commercial or industrial space. Based on that assessment, the water district may require the developer to alter the project's design to decrease the water demand, or to make financial arrangements to increase the water supply.

Who Pays for Growth?

Matching water demand with water supply as the area grows is one thing, but who pays for all the infrastructure to support this growth? The Alameda County Water District has a policy that growth pays for itself. That means all the costs associated with providing water to a new development are borne by the developer. All the new excavation, piping, valves, and hydrants are all part of the developer's costs.

And what about the cost of the additional water itself? ACWD points out that they have already provided for sufficient water supply to meet growth without increasing costs. They also note that

providing additional water to new customers can actually decrease the water district's fixed costs by spreading them over a larger customer base.

Looking Back

In 2013, the Alameda County Water District reported on their progress in implementing the goals of Integrated Resources Planning. Here is a portion of that report:

“The 1995 plan clearly established what ACWD needed to do: develop local water supplies, conserve water, use existing supplies as efficiently as possible, and find a way to store water for dry years..... Today, ACWD and its customers have met or exceeded nearly all the goals set in 1995. Per capita water demand has dropped more than 25 percent. And the district's overall water supply reliability has improved dramatically. Following the principles of the IRP process, ACWD has continued to adapt to changing circumstances and plan for the future.”

Looking Ahead

In the future, the district would like to see cities take the next step by officially adopting the 2010 California Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance for new developments. That ordinance limits the sizes of lawns, recommends alternative planting options, and regulates the type and positioning of irrigation systems to maximize water efficiency and minimize water loss. ACWD points out that the new ordinance promotes a way to reduce water use while still providing attractive landscaping and reducing yard maintenance.

All comments and concerns about the impact of new housing on water services should be directed to the Alameda County Water District. To view their website, go to www.acwd.org

For information about proposed residential developments go to:

www.ShapeOurFremont.com