

City of Menlo Park Supplemental Emergency Water Supply Project Public Meeting Transcript

Meeting Date/Time: May 28, 2008, 7:00–9:30 p.m. (open house, 6:30–7:00)

Meeting Location: Burgess Recreation Center

Number of Attendees: approximately 40

Introduction/Overview: presented by Lisa Ekers. **Central message:** The City is aware of community concerns about the potential use of Seminary Oaks Park for the proposed reservoir project. This is the first of several meetings regarding this project to inform you and collect your concerns.

Following Lisa Ekers' introductory remarks, Ruben Niño and the consultant team gave a slide presentation on the proposed project. To ensure that all questions and comments would be heard, meeting attendees were asked to fill out "speaker cards" if they wished to comment or ask questions.

Public Questions and Comments

Questions Discussed Before Speaker Cards

Q: Can we get copies of the presentation?

A: The City will put the presentation on the website, as indicated on the blue comment sheet.

Q: Is the website referenced on the blue comment sheet? It's not there.

A: Please send email to Jennifer or Virginia, who will provide you the link. Jennifer noted that the City of Menlo Park's homepage and MPMWD homepage have links to the project from their websites.

Q: Has anyone been in our neighborhood on a holiday, for instance on Halloween? Has the study investigated the celebrations on this holiday? It makes our neighborhood so unique.

A: No.

Follow-Up Q: This needs to be considered. How will the project disrupt the neighborhood for the holidays?

A: These questions will go onto the project website.

Q: We spend almost every birthday and holiday in the park. Why weren't we notified prior to you spending all that money on the studies performed so far? Do we have any impact to say what happens? Will you answer this question now? Also the Fourth of July.

A: We've had numerous discussions with City Council. We've just now determined it is feasible from an engineering standpoint to build here. We didn't know that before. There are numerous issues associated with providing a reservoir in a park. We also looked at purchasing property other than in Seminary Oaks. The eastern portion of Menlo Park had groundwater problems. Burgess Park was too far away. So we investigated until we could find a site that would meet engineering requirements. We have only concluded within the last couple of months that this site is feasible from the engineering perspective.

Follow-Up Q: The question was why we weren't informed. Why wait until now?

A: We only just now determined a preferred site.

Q: You evaluated 9 potential sites, but there might have been 30 that would have been potential sites. For instance, the fire station seems a logical potential site. Why was the Seminary St. Patrick's Seminary rejected, or acquiring properties through eminent domain?

A: We considered specific criteria. For the fire station, there are issues with relocating the facility. It's not cost-effective. The parking lot is not big enough. The Seminary site on Middlefield has a large open space of 15 acres. The City Council discussed this location on two occasions. Discussions got pretty far, but the Seminary didn't want to sell. They turned us down. In the past six months, we have asked again.

Q: Was the deal with not including the Seminary among the alternatives linked with sports fields, which the Seminary did not want?

A: Yes, the original option considered sports fields but the second did not. Also, costs associated with purchase or lease from the Seminary. The City Council has to report to water purveyors.

Discussion Using Speaker Cards

Roldano Guerra: Will dogs still be allowed to walk in the park?

A: Yes, on a leash.

Mark Tuschman: I don't know where to start. I'm upset about this. I want to address the people sitting here *indicated the speakers' table*. I don't know how long you've been associated with this project. Ten years ago, we lived on Santa Monica and there was a big open space adjacent to our homes. Then the City decided to develop the Seminary Oaks subdivision, and this city park was the carrot that was given to the neighbors to get them to accept this project. Now the park is well used. It has 14–15 mature trees. People in the community are incensed over this. We realize that we need an emergency water supply and are glad to help you find alternatives, but the Park is not negotiable. If the City is looking for ways to save money, stop this process now and start looking for ways to work with people in community.

A: We know there will be issues with the park. What it comes down to is setting the criteria and finding the best site. There are not many sites within the water system that would be appropriate. Menlo Park is pretty well built-out; there is not much available land. Any park site that we consider will have issues.

Follow-Up Comment: Maybe we should find an industrial space.

Jack Kearns: The size of the reservoir is a pretty big factor. How and when will you determine the size?

A: The question is, how much insurance does the City want? We don't have that answer from the Council. We will provide some alternatives, and will have to figure out the long-term operating costs and also the insurance level the Council desires (e.g., an emergency of 8 hours or 2 days). The question of how much insurance is a policy issue for the Council, and they will have to determine this. We'll provide information on costs.

Follow-Up Q: Three million gallons and six million gallons have very different construction effects. Will the decision of what size reservoir come out later?

A: Yes, when the Council determines.

Follow-Up Comment: There seems to be a possible partnership with CalWater. That could be another factor in the final size of the reservoir.

Follow-Up Q: In the big picture of water supply, what is the City doing for water conservation efforts. Are there plans for a water reclamation facility?

A: We are currently looking at the option of using groundwater for irrigation. We are looking at different park sites, for instance, with a large groundwater pump station at one site or multiple smaller sites. We've negotiated with Redwood City and Palo Alto on their reclaimed water facilities, but they are too far away.

Bob Marsheck: What prompted the study? Why wasn't this emergency reservoir considered when the housing development was built? The reservoir could have been integrated into the housing development. Further, will there be disinfecting chemicals kept at the pump station?

A: We have looked at needs and modeled our water system. Based on the overall water system, we determined the water needs. We intended to answer the question, "From long-term maintenance program, what is needed?" At the time of this modeling effort, there was no Seminary Oaks.

Follow-Up Comment: When you plan a housing development, usually you consider water supply. The timing would have been better.

A: Originally this development was not on the Menlo Park water system. At the time it was built, it went to CalWater because they would accept it. It was a period of water rationing and MPMWD did not want to accept responsibility for another housing development. Further, the Seminary Oaks development receives a very small amount of the whole allocation.

Follow-Up Q: So Vintage Oaks is not benefiting?

A: The question is what benefit does the subdivision receive? Two purposes of the proposed reservoir. First, immediate storage in case of fire or emergency. Currently, there is no storage in that area. Second, the long-term value of groundwater pumping. If SFPUC supply is disrupted, CalWater has capacity. However, all the water we MPMWD depend on is from San Francisco SFPUC. We are solely dependent on them, so we need storage and groundwater pumping. The water supply system was built in the 1920s and is archaic.

Follow-Up Q: So will Vintage Oaks benefit?

A (Lisa): Perhaps I can help with the question of how the subdivision would benefit in the event of emergency. I live in Santa Cruz and I've had some direct experience with these issues. We are all used to our domestic water system working in a certain way. The CalWater system is isolated from Menlo Park city water. In Santa Cruz during the flooding a few years ago, we had no water. Our water supply was washed away. We got water temporarily from neighboring cities. We used 5-gallon jugs to get water. We also had no power. It was an unusual situation for the water districts to plan for, but they could deal with it. If a hydrant isn't working, what will happen for fire-fighting? Fire fighters will get water from the nearest hydrant. We know the water is there, and it is shared in the case of emergency. We don't know the exact details of how the solutions will be worked out until the time comes; you have to trust to a certain extent that these solutions will happen—we the City want to provide emergency supply.

Additional Follow-Up Q: How large would the pump station facility be? Would chemicals be stored there?

A (Skip Lewis, IEC): The footprint of the pump station would be 24 x 72 feet. It would be an above-ground facility; the wall height would 14 feet. There will be the need to add disinfectant. We are anticipating a chloramination disinfecting system, utilizing liquid sodium hypochlorite and aqua ammonia.

Bill Frawenhofer: I assume that this alternative is considered to be the best cost option because the City doesn't want to purchase additional land. But the proposed reservoir will have a significant effect on our property values. Have you considered property values and what do you expect to do about that? What about buying other properties, across from Safeway or in the Ravenswood area?

A: This will be considered at a later date.

Follow-Up Comment: You started with criteria, but the residents would prefer if you lease or buy land.

A: Cost is just one issue, but there are also site constraints.

Follow-Up Comment: But the landowners are paying the price. We asked for clarification.

A: Properties in MPMWD have been paying a capital surcharge. The City has been planning on an upgrade for the past 15 years. We now have a reserve of over \$10 million for building the reservoir. Residents have already been paying in advance.

Mike Cassick: I share a number of these concerns. I have tried to consider carefully whether I am having a typical NIMBY reaction, and I am sure it's not that. I applaud the forethought and the wisdom of preparing for an emergency, but the word "disruption" to the park isn't the right word, because you can't put trees back. It seems tragic that this is not one of the criteria. None of the criteria is "do something that does no permanent harm." Why is permanent disruption not one of the criteria?

A: This is a criterion; it's just a matter of priorities. Also, there are trees at all of the potential sites. It has to do with priorities placed on the different criteria.

Follow-Up Q: I didn't see this criterion on the list. Also, seems that building a pipeline 0.25 mile to get to Burgess Park is less extreme than removing these trees. Further, this project would take 100% of the park and make it such that there could be no trees on it. If you could find other parks... For instance, Bayfront...but there, the groundwater is too close. How about putting the water reservoir on top of a hill, use gravity feed to transport the water here, and install a pump station nearby.

A: The cost in the Bayfront area would be prohibitive because the soil is unstable. It is a landfill and subject to uneven settling. It could be engineered but it would be expensive. Also, we can put trees on the Seminary Oaks site, in wells. They would not be in the ground, so it would restrict their size, and we would have to design the reservoir roof appropriately.

Follow-Up Q: You mean brick-sided planter-type beds?

A: Yes.

Elaine White: You were given a set of criteria and looked within these criteria to find an answer. I suggest that you go back a step. Significant emphasis should be given to property that is not

currently owned by the City. The people in the MPMWD service district pay less for water than those from CalWater, so if water has to be bought from the Seminary or from SRI which owns a great deal of unused land, that does not seem to present a financial problem. You should put back on list of criteria the option of purchasing property and evaluating on that basis. Being able to pay for that land makes more sense. We asked, “can the criteria be revisited?” I haven’t yet heard the answer. Also, you said you will go back to City Council, but that is with respect to environmental analysis. Is there room to go back to City Council on the basis of revisiting the criteria?

A: This is the “preferred site,” it’s not the site. We can tell the Council we can build here based on these criteria. The Council can make a decision and direct us to consider whatever they believe is important.

Follow-Up Comment: That gets back to property values. The people whose property values would be hurt don’t benefit from the project.

A: Our intention is to replace as much as possible. You will lose trees, but otherwise we’ll put it the way you want.

Linda Umbach: Why does MPMWD not turn itself over to CalWater? CalWater has not tried to put a reservoir in. They don’t seem to need it. So if MPMWD is having problems, maybe it should join up.

Follow-Up Comment: *Asked the speaker to display the schematic drawing of the water district areas.* The eastern part of Menlo Park is a small area, so CalWater should effectively be able to address this.

A: CalWater rates are higher than MPMWD rates. Also, CalWater is actively looking for reservoir sites. The intent is for us to partner with them to make it possible for them to do it install a reservoir cost-effectively.

Follow-Up Comment *Addressed to the Consultants at the speakers’ table:* Were you involved in the committee that decided on the justification for additional water?

A (Ruben Niño): That was a different consultant.

Follow-Up Q: Why don’t we put the tank on the Hetch-Hetchy ROW along Bay Road?

A: SFPUC won’t allow it. They intend to put in another water line, plus they have very strict requirements.

Walter Umbach: I used to work for a company that manufactured pumps, including pumps for silent-running submarines. It is difficult and expensive to make a quiet pump. You’ll have a raft of lawsuits because of the noise coming from that pump. I would suggest you reconsider Burgess Park, where you can locate the pump away from residences.

A (Skip Lewis, IEC): Here’s a little background. For a pump station like this one, we would include an acoustical engineer as part of the pump station design team

to plan how to attenuate the sound generated by pump. These pumps are submersible. However, not all of the mechanism would be underground. The motors would not, and the motors are what generate the noise.

Follow-Up Comment: You also have to ventilate for the motors, which makes it hard to isolate the sound.

A: The pump station at the Mountain View reservoir Graham School reservoir site is closer to residences than at the Seminary Oaks site, and noise is not a problem.

Margaret Spake: Asked speaker to display the schematic drawing of water districts. The part of Menlo Park on CalWater relies on reservoirs in the hills. Why can't we build a reservoir in the hills? We don't see CalWater digging up part of Menlo Park to put in a reservoir. The other reservoir in west Menlo Park is on Stanford land. Why can't we do that? If CalWater can have remote reservoirs why can't MPMWD do it too? Stanford gave Menlo Park a good deal to put a reservoir on Stanford land. Why do we need it in our neighborhood?

A: There are a couple of issues. If there is an emergency, it will probably be from an earthquake. If we are cut off from a western reservoir, we won't have solved the emergency supply problem.

Follow-Up Comment: But the western side is on bedrock.

A: But you'd still be taking the pipeline across 10 or 11 miles.

Follow-Up Comment: So, in case of earthquake, CalWater won't have water? Are you saying that we should pay for CalWater to have this backup? When you do your environmental impact study, are you going to take into the account loss of property values in our neighborhood?

A: This won't be part of the analysis. It's a short-term loss.

Follow-Up Comment: For a park with beautiful trees, it's a long-term cost when the trees are cut down. I'm in health care. Researchers are finding that quality of life is very important to level of health in a neighborhood. When we ask about consideration of alternative sites, all we hear from the City is "too costly." I don't know the analysis and potential other options. For example, have you gone to the school district and had negotiations about putting reservoir over there?

A: No.

Follow-Up Comment: This is because the project team started from the stand point that Menlo Park must own the land.

Follow-Up Comment: This well educated group is giving very useful feedback.

Jana Tuschman: I live on Santa Monica and know from experience that it is impossible to mitigate the impact on the neighborhood from construction of this magnitude. This project is characterized by overemphasis on cost, lack of creativity, and short-sightedness. This process seems like “déjà vu all over again.” We were given this park in return for accepting the housing development. We all care about our emotional health and physical health. This place is very special to us.

Follow-Up Q: Is the pump station for emergency use or irrigation? Will it function 24 hours?

A: The pump will be used to supply water for domestic purposes, not for irrigation. The pump will not run 24 hours daily, but rather off and on.

Follow-Up Q: So we are making money for the City to supply water for irrigation to fields?

A: No.

Follow-Up Comment: The tank is in series with normal supply, so Hetch-Hetchy water flows into it. It's like a battery. Those pumps will run continuously as water is drawn off.

Follow-Up Q: I thought it was for emergency supply. Why will water be being drawn off?

A: We have to operate the reservoir continuously. We'll draw down the water to keep the water fresh. Water ages. The water tank is for emergencies, but the tank will be part of the water system to keep the water fresh.

Follow-Up Q: What will be the environmental impacts on groundwater and San Francisquito Creek? This is very important to us. So many things have been done to the natural creeks in our area that people are not aware of, and the effects are important environmentally, and the changes affect the Bay.

A: This will be analyzed as part of the Initial Study.

Patrick Fannon: You said that the premise for the reservoir, as considered in this study, is for emergency purposes. Your slide showed that an emergency might last up to 60 days, but your water tank would supply only 24–48 hours.

A: The time varies depending on the season, but you're right. It's not a long time. That is the purpose for the groundwater pumping station. If SFPUC goes out, there will be no domestic water. So after the first couple of days, the water in reservoir would be gone, so then we would pump.

Follow-Up Q: This leads to my second question. Please re-display the schematic drawing of the new park. I want to understand the size of the pumping station because this will change the size of the park.

A: Yes.

Follow-Up Q: The surface of the park will be higher, right?

A: The park will be sloped and raised 4–5 feet.

Follow-Up Comment: Responsibility on this point comes back to us as landowners, and our ability to communicate directly to City Council. This is an aspect that must be considered. To say that there will be no property value impact is absolutely wrong.

Kathy Switky: You said earlier that the City had studied sites for below-ground reservoirs and for above-ground storage. Tell us more about above-ground.

A: This was a joint investigation with East Palo Alto. They looked into industrial sites.

Follow-Up Q: Were above-ground sites considered?

A: Yes, but aesthetics was an issue.

Follow-Up Q: But the sites were not studied, so it is possible that an aboveground site would exist.

A: You'd have to mask it with a shell building.

Follow-Up Comment: Or plant lots of trees around it.

Follow-Up Q: Cost seems to be a driving factor in the decisions thus far. Another central criterion has been that the site be owned by the City. This site Seminary Oaks is the smallest of all the sites that were considered. Why, when we were considering cost, did we not consider that looking at City-owned sites limits the potential size of the site? With purchase or long-term lease, we could build a larger reservoir that would better serve our needs, particularly because some of the costs are fixed costs. Why was the criterion for City-owned land put on the list, and who put it on the list?

A: It was considered to be cost-effective. There is not much open space land in the City. We tried to consider other options. The only school that would be feasible would be Willow Oaks because we are trying to locate the reservoir centrally. Considerations with respect to putting the reservoir under a school include agreements and operation. This option wasn't further explored for that reason.

Follow-Up Comment: Schools are being torn up now for renovation. That is in process now. That would be the perfect time to install a reservoir. Further comments and cross-talk addressed whether schools would be "centrally located."

Follow-Up Q: So who put on the list of criteria that the reservoir must be on City-owned land?

A: You must consider that the long-term benefit is not the reservoir, it's the groundwater. There is a cost associated with operating a bigger reservoir.

Eric Selvito: When was Seminary Oaks Park approved as the preferred alternative?

A: September 2005.

Follow-Up Q: When did City Council approve the criteria?

A: The City Council did not approve the criteria as such, but rather saw the presentation. Look at the staff report. It's on the website. It contains information about criteria and the joint study.

Follow-Up Q: With respect to the community involvement process, when will the report be made to the Council?

A: After the public meetings, late this year or early 2009. It's not a foregone conclusion. *In response to follow-up question.* That presentation will not include environmental studies. Instead, we'll present this as a feasible site, and ask whether the Council wants to proceed based on the public input we've received.

Follow-Up Q: Why is it important that the reservoir be centrally located, and what do you mean by that?

A: The time you need the water is in an emergency.

Follow-Up Q: So your concern is that the pipe that supplies the water will be damaged in an earthquake.

A: You can't place an underground reservoir in the eastern part of Menlo Park because of groundwater. So that limited the area under consideration. But then on the other hand, we're looking at significant pipeline to upgrade the system. The potential for earthquake also limited the area under consideration.

Follow-Up Q: Are you saying that if the reservoir is too far to the west, you'll have to do pipe upgrades? Where is "centrally located?"

A: Yes, there is loss in the system when water is pumped.

Elizabeth Shane: What do the Council members have to do with this the reservoir project at this point? There's a lot of emphasis in the City on "going green, and this is not a "go-green" project. It seems obvious that you should look at places where you would not take out green. All schools are being redone because of the recent bond, including Oak Knoll. It's a perfect time to do it. In school yards, you can put lawns on top of the reservoir. Holding the park design workshops beginning in August seems like putting the cart before the horse, that is, designing this park in August when it isn't happening yet and we're not even sure it's going to happen. Some of this money spending has to stop. What do you have to say about the workshops?

A: We will evaluate after this evening's meeting. We might need to have another meeting to respond to some of these questions. This is our first meeting. We'll evaluate this input and determine whether we can respond to these issues.

Debra Vernon: I am shocked that the neighborhood that you will affect won't benefit from the reservoir. One cost you haven't mentioned is the human cost. It's not even one of your criteria. That's shocking to me. Someone here tonight talked about the holiday use. Also, hundreds of kids use the park. My son has made friends there. I have a baby on the way and I think how sad it would be if she can't use the park. Also, it surprised me that you might want to make part of the park available during construction, but any parent will not want their children playing there during active construction. Further, it will also be impossible for us to consider selling our houses during that period. This is legally "take."

A: One of our considerations was use. Willow Oaks is a new park with many uses (for example, the parking lot, tennis courts, dog park, sports field). The human factor was considered.

Follow-Up Comment: but that's short-term.

A: No, it's long-term.

Roger Crawley: Please go over again why you don't consider Burgess Park area any more. I realize it's on the edge of the geographic service area, but it's only about a mile from our park, and given the degradation that would happen in our little park compared to putting it in here the Burgess Park site, it seems Burgess Park is a better choice. I'm told the pipelines are strikes against it.

A: We considered the human factor. There are multiple uses at Burgess Park. Any place we put a reservoir will have significant issues. We had to develop a system to narrow them down.

Bill Evans: When is the next meeting like this one scheduled?

A: It has not yet been scheduled.

Follow-Up Comment: You should include Council member(s), MPMWD member(s), and the City comptroller in that meeting. There are issues that we can't address in this group.

Follow-Up Q: Will having a groundwater pump solve the water supply problem?

A: No. The storage is for immediate need. The groundwater only provides a certain emergency capacity.

Follow-Up Comment: A different above-ground reservoir could solve the fire problem.

Follow-Up Comment: Please schedule the follow-up meeting soon.

Follow-Up Comment: I sense a filtered view coming from the presentation. We neighborhood landowners need to hear from other key technical stakeholders. Also, what has happened to Flood Park as an option? When we met as a group, Flood Park was under consideration.

A: We haven't looked at that yet again. If we could use it, it would be for groundwater at most.

Follow-Up Comment: It has occurred to me that five feet tall is neck height. What slope is the park?

A: No answer recorded. *This will be determined after a size and shape for the reservoir has been decided.*

Follow-Up Q: We didn't hear the answer to whether you would consider inviting other technical stakeholders.

A: We'll discuss among staff how to proceed.

Doris Landman: I have a different concern. We have property on Arlington Way. It has a well. The VA hospital also has a well. What impact will there be on houses that have wells?

A: The Seminary also has a well. We do not foresee an impact. There is a significant aquifer below the site.

Follow-Up Q: When we bought that house in 1961, we hoped we could use the groundwater, but we learned it was not potable. What will you do with the proposed pumped groundwater? It's the same groundwater.

A: If we use the groundwater for domestic purposes, it will have to be treated.

Elliott Jones: What would change the status from this being the preferred location to the not-preferred location?

A: We won't know until we do the Initial Study. That's the real reason for the CEQA process.

Follow-Up Q: Does that mean that at this point, there is nothing to stop this from being the final solution?

A: At this point, no.

Follow-Up Q: What if you remove cost as a criterion, what would be the solution?

A: I don't know. We would have to analyze.

Follow-Up Q: Everyone here would like to know the answer to that question. If cost is the challenge, we can take that on as an issue to manage. We can take responsibility.

A: Would you neighbors take on the cost?

Follow-Up Question: We're already paying with the implication that, accepting the reservoir in our park would be paying. Don't you think you could raise the money for this from a bond in Menlo Park?

A: Would you be willing to compensate?

Follow-Up Comment: If you add a surcharge to my water for 10 years, in order to have the reservoir on Seminary land, yes, I'd do it.

Follow-Up Q: What is the difference in the cost burden if we run out of water, so that a reservoir that is twice or three times as large would make fiscal sense (1 day versus 5 days supply)?

A: That's difficult to answer.

Kathy Kwan: I didn't have any biases coming into this meeting. However, I did hear tonight that there would be chemicals on the site. Is there a public health hazard such that the park might not be available to the community? It seems you'd not want to mix kids and chemicals, irrespective of the size of the park? Or the amount of stored chemicals?. If you can, you should include this in the study for the EIR. As a member of Vintage Oaks, having chemicals in the neighborhood would prompt me to move and would undermine my property value.

A: The chemicals are the same as those used at public pools. Kids are also there around pools.

Follow-Up Comment: But the park is a public good.

A: This issue will be analyzed as part of the initial study.

Follow-Up Q: Has any thought been put into the effect on structures, such as vibrations and land stability?

A: If the Council decides to proceed to that stage, it will be part of the initial study.

Jill Robertson: As you pump groundwater, will our land not subside, will our foundations not crack?

A: That depends on how much is pumped.

Follow-Up Q: How much will be pumped?

A: We don't know yet.

Carl Landman: My wife and I have been homeowners in this area since the end of WWII. We need to consider a larger period of time and space than we have been focusing on. If we consider a larger period of time and space, we realize that we've been the

beneficiaries of the blessings of the world; we're sitting on top of the world. Millions everywhere don't have enough to eat. You all seem to think, don't get too close to my back yard. Please consider the benefits that accrue from cooperating. You've heard in the current presidential competition the idea of making a change and making this world more cooperative, rather than fighting each other, because fighting each other isn't going to lead anywhere. Forget about the past, focus on the future. I want to congratulate these people at the speakers' table who have given lots of time to put their best efforts into making our future as profitable and as useful as possible. The idea of providing for emergency situation is laudable. Later, after this has been done, they will point to Menlo Park and say, "Look at these guys in Menlo Park—they did something that we should have done." That needs to be kept in mind, and some of us need to consider that as a high priority.

Meeting Concluded.