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EBMUD EXPLAINS CHANGE

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The East Bay Municipal Utility District Board listened to ratepayers from both sides of the hills, weighed their views carefully, and responded with a change in the single-family residential rate structure.

The changed rates, which start Jan. 1, retain the four-tier conservation rate structure but lower the rate charged to those who use more than 738 gallons per day (gpd). Water rates for the average water user do not increase.

Water use up to 172 gallons per day (gpd) is still charged at \$1.09 per unit (a unit is 748 gallons). Use between 173 gpd and 393 gpd is still \$1.35 per unit, use between 394 gpd and 738 gpd is \$1.65 per unit (up from \$1.50), and water use over 738 gpd is \$1.95 per unit (down from \$3.44)

Under these rates, the average east of the hills monthly water bill is still \$26.43 (for 393 gpd) and the average west of the hills monthly bill will remain unchanged at \$15.15 (for 200 gpd).

Inaccurate information leaked

During the recent water rate debate, inaccurate information was put forth, most recently in WATER Chairman Charles Brydon's opinion piece (Times, Dec. 6). That group claims to represent customers east of the hills. In the public interest, I will correct the misinformation.

Single-family residential customers on the east side of the hills do not subsidize customers on the west side. East of hills customers use about 35 percent of our total single-family residential water consumption and produce about 36 percent of the total single-family residential revenue.

Tiered rates (where you pay more per gallon for the more water you use) are a fair method of charging for water use to encourage conservation. Tiered pricing has become the trend in California. Major environmental groups and 200 California water agencies signed an agreement recognizing tiered pricing as an effective way to encourage water conservation. Water is a precious limited resource and we must continue to encourage long term water conservation. WATER sued in 1992 the district and lost. The state court of Appeals ruled that EBMUD's

tiered rate structure was fair and was a legitimate way to encourage conservation. This lawsuit cost EBMUD ratepayers over \$60,000.

East of hills customers do not pay 80 percent of the total cost of EBMUD's seismic improvement program. They pay 33 percent of the cost (while using 35 percent of EBMUD's water). Benefits derived from the seismic upgrades will be districtwide and will help keep water flowing to all parts of EBMUD following a major earthquake.

EBMUD's ward boundaries are fair. Boundaries meet the federal requirement that they be drawn on the basis of population. Approximately 20 percent of EBMUD's population is east of the hills. On EBMUD's seven-member Board, this means 1.4 directors. Director John Coleman's ward is completely on the east side and Director Katy Foulkes' ward is about 40 percent on the east side. Anything more would violate federal law. EBMUD was sued by WATER over the 1991 redistricting. WATER dismissed the lawsuit after EBMUD agreed to waive court sanctions of \$18,000 against that group. The suit cost EBMUD ratepayers \$50,000.

Central Contra Costa customers do not have sole ownership of 125 million gallons per day (mgd) of water rights. EBMUD filed a water rights application in 1949 for an additional 125 mgd to meet growing population needs on both sides of the hills during and after World War II. EBMUD water rights are assigned to the district as a whole, not a specific portion of our service area.

Don't split district

Splitting EBMUD into two agencies is a bad idea. Splitting EBMUD is highly complex and requires careful consideration of many issues related to water rights, instream flows to meet state and federally imposed requirements for environmental protection, ability of smaller districts to comply with increasingly more stringent water regulations, ability to adequately address regional water resource management concerns, debt collection, impact on bond ratings, and costs of implementing a reorganization.

It is unfortunate that WATER and Director Coleman are advocating that Contra Costans split from EBMUD and form its own water district. A separate district would make it harder for all customers to be confident that their taps will continue to provide reliable, high-quality water at the lower price.

EBMUD's water rates are among the most reasonable in the East Bay. Rates in the neighboring Contra Costa Water District and Dublin-San Ramon Services District are higher than ours.

EBMUD has been working hard to meet the East Bay's water needs into the 21st century. We have a long-term water plan calling for new water reclamation projects and water conservation programs, developing additional water storage capacity, and responsibly using our additional water rights on the American River. Efforts to split EBMUD will make successful implementation of our water plan more difficult.

John Gioia is president of EBMUD Board of Directors.

Caption:

Photo, Mug of John Gioia.

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