

CUSD board opposes disease-causing bugs, delays solar power vote

Endorses mosquito-fighting fee, delays sun power action

By Roger Aylworth

raylworth@chicoer.com @RogerAylworth on Twitter

Posted: 04/16/2014 09:14:13 PM PDT

CHICO >> Effectively the Chico Unified School District board of trustees took the position they are opposed to disease-spreading insects, and they want to delay a decision on how to finance a new round of solar arrays.

Wednesday evening Matthew Ball, manager of the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District, asked the CUSD board of trustees to endorse a campaign his agency has launched to get voters to approve a parcel tax.

At the end of the month property owners in Butte County and in Hamilton City will be sent a vote-by-mail ballot asking their consent to add an annual parcel fee to their property taxes.

For residential properties on an acre of land or less the fee would be \$9.69 a year.

Ball told the board, the district he heads has been in existence since 1948 and in those 66 years it has never asked anything from the public beyond the tiny fraction of a percent of their property tax it receives.

He said the demands on his agency have grown over the years and fiscal pressure has forced the district to cut both seasonal and full-time staff.

Despite what the mosquito district does, few people are aware it exists.

In 2004, when concerns about West Nile virus pushed their mosquito-fighting efforts more into the urban areas, more people began to recognize their work.

Since then two other varieties of mosquito have moved into California, but not close to Butte County, that carry both Dengue fever and Yellow fever.

Ball said, if these diseases become an issue in the state they would make West Nile virus look like a minor concern.

He said the parcel fee, which would include assessments on agricultural, industrial and commercial property, would generate about \$795,000 which would allow the agency to expand its protection and education programs.

At the same time he said if the ballot measure fails the agency would continue to operate.

Kathy Kaiser, president of the board of trustees, said she has two friends who either themselves or some member in their families have been permanently injured by tick-borne Lyme disease.

She said she could wholeheartedly endorse the district's campaign. The board voted unanimously to endorse the effort and directed CUSD Superintendent Kelly Staley to prepare a letter of support. Trustee Linda Hovey was absent from the meeting so the vote was 4-0.

On another topic the trustees voted to put off any decision on how to fund proposed solar power projects at five elementary schools.

Keith Weaver, a consultant to the district from a firm called Government Management Strategies, told the trustees that Sierra View, Emma Wilson, Neal Dow, Parkview, and Rosedale schools are the district campuses that would produce "the most bang for your buck, so to speak."

He said solar arrays on these campuses would produce a combined 740 watts of power and the projects would cost an estimated \$3.1 million.

At present the CUSD appears to be second in line for a zero interest loan from the California Energy Commission, but at it was not clear how much money the loan would be for and when it might be funded.

Weaver said there are other ways to fund the projects but he, along with Assistant Superintendent for Business Kevin Bultema, and Julie Kistle, district director of construction and facilities, said there was no "down side" in putting off a funding decision until CEC makes a ruling on the loan.

The board voted to take no immediate action on the loan and wait until sometime in the fall to reconsider the issue.

Contact reporter Roger H. Aylworth 896-7762.