

CAMBRIA COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT

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Dear CCSD customer:

As a new year begins, it is time to reflect on the year just past as well as to look ahead at 2015. About 2014 I can say this: It was one of the most eventful years in Cambria's history.

You all know the sequence of events. Last January, California was in the third year of a severe drought, and Cambria faced the real prospect of running out of water in a few months. Two things kept this from happening.

One was the extraordinary effort by CCSD customers to cut back on their water use. For all of 2014 – including January, before Stage 3 conservation measures were in effect – water consumption was down 36% from the year before. This was one of the most remarkable conservation achievements in all of California, and I am thankful to all of you for making it happen.

The other crucial factor was the planning, financing, permitting and construction of the new Emergency Water Supply (EWS) project off San Simeon Creek Road. The EWS is now able to produce a reliable source of drinking water less than a year after the CCSD Board of Directors authorized the first funds toward its engineering and construction – a notably short turnaround time for a public-works project of this complexity. With the EWS completed, Cambria is ready to face whatever 2015 might bring, confident that it will have enough water to meet its needs if the drought continues.

Here again, I would like to thank you for your help. After decades of debate over what to do about our chronic water shortage, Cambrians clearly decided that it was time to do something about it. So they stepped up to the plate. The EWS could not have been built without your willingness to assume the costs of its construction and operation. Also, your public expressions of support for the project surely helped make state regulators and policy-makers more aware of Cambria's needs – and the views of its residents.

So where do we go from here? What will change for CCSD customers?

The short answer is that little will change right away. Major policy decisions such as adjusting water restrictions can be made only by the CCSD Board, which meets next on January 29. Looking further ahead, the question of how much the EWS will be used this year depends on the drought, which at this point is far from over. It may take more than one rainy season to know if Cambria's groundwater supplies are back to normal. Again looking ahead, how much we can use the EWS in future years also depends on the terms of a regular Coastal Development Permit, which would replace the emergency permit that governs the project's operation now.

Here are some specific questions that you may be asking about the EWS and how it will affect you:

Will water restrictions be relaxed when the EWS is on line?

The EWS is permitted to operate only when Stage 3 water restrictions are in effect. The CCSD Board can adjust those rules to some degree, but they still must be consistent with a strict conservation program appropriate to a severe drought. The CCSD can relax restrictions significantly only when it declares the Stage 3 emergency is over. However,

once the Stage 3 emergency declaration is lifted by the CCSD Board, the plant will not be allowed to operate until a regular Coastal Development permit has been issued on the project, or a subsequent Stage 3 Emergency is declared.

Will I be charged the “operations” fee even if the EWS operates only for testing and training purposes?

It is up to the CCSD Board whether to charge the operations fee when the EWS is running in the current start-up phase. Up to three months of actual water production are needed to optimize operation of the new plant and to train CCSD staff fully. This period can be treated as the final phase of construction; accordingly, the CCSD Directors may choose to refrain from charging the operating fee. Later, when the purpose of running the plant is solely to produce drinking water in drought conditions, the fee will be added to bills when the plant is operating.

What is the difference between the “emergency” and “regular” Coastal Development Permit, and why is the regular permit important?

The emergency Coastal Development Permit (CDP), which the County granted last May to allow construction and operation of the EWS, was never intended to be the last word on permitting for the project. One of its conditions, in fact, *required* the CCSD to apply for a regular CDP to govern the operation of the facility for the long term. One major difference between the emergency and regular CDP is that the latter is fully subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Under the governor’s drought declaration, the emergency CDP exempted the project from the usual CEQA review. The CCSD has applied for the regular CDP and has engaged the firm RBF Consulting to prepare an environmental impact report as part of the approval process.

The most important difference between the emergency and regular CDP is in the level of restriction on the operation of the EWS. The emergency CDP is highly restrictive, allowing EWS operation only when Cambrians are under stringent conservation rules. Our goal in securing the regular CDP is to have much more operational flexibility, so that Cambrians can get the benefit of EWS water under a wider range of conditions. Right now, the EWS can only be used in response to a severe water shortage. We want it to be used to *prevent* such shortages as well – to act as “drought insurance.”

The approval of a regular CDP remains a high priority for the CCSD. The EIR alone will take several months to complete. Be assured that Cambria now has a level of drought protection that it never had before. Together, our community has turned a corner on ensuring a more stable water system and we look forward to the continued improvements to come in 2015. For that, I again thank you for the support you have given us in this challenging time, and for all you have done to make Cambria a model for other California communities.

Sincerely,



Jerry Gruber
General Manager
Cambria Community Services District