

Planner of water recycling to retire

Baker took San Ramon Valley program through complex first phase

By Rebecca F. Johnson, STAFF WRITER
Inside Bay Area

DUBLIN — Bob Baker, head of the joint authority that oversees the San Ramon Valley Recycled Water Program now coming online, will retire from his post in January.

Baker leads DERWA, a recycled water authority formed 10 years ago by the Dublin San Ramon Services District and East Bay Municipal Utilities District. On Monday night, members of the DERWA board met in closed session to discuss finding Baker's replacement.

Baker, who formerly managed the Central Contra Costa Sanitary District engineering department, was hired out of retirement in December 2002 to lead the recycled water program through its first phase.

The \$100 million project is expected to be fully operational by summer 2006 and will eventually supply recycled water to Blackhawk, Danville, San Ramon and Dublin.

"It's a very ambitious project," Baker said, adding that it will be one of the largest recycled water programs in Northern California.

According to the California Water Code, recycled water is defined as "water which, as a result of treatment of waste, is suitable for a direct beneficial use or a controlled use that would not otherwise occur."

The recycled water, which is currently being used in eastern Dublin and the Dougherty Valley, serves schools, parks and homeowners associations for landscaping purposes.

Baker oversaw the design completion and construction of the 16 1/2 miles of "backbone" pipeline that snakes through the cities along the Iron Horse Trail, Bollinger Canyon and Dougherty roads.

The system also includes two reservoirs, two pump tanks and a wastewater treatment plant that is currently undergoing a permitting process and may be running by February.

Once complete, the system will provide about 3.3 millions of gallons per day of recycled water. In the second phase of the project — which Baker estimates will take place in five to seven years — the system capacity will be expanded to 5.7 million gallons per day.

The second phase will require negotiations with the city of Pleasanton, which Baker said might be tricky.

"In the 1900s, people were fighting over fresh water," he said. "In the next century, people will be fighting over recycled water because water is a very scarce commodity."

During his tenure, Baker, who negotiated with the local government districts to achieve the goal of the somewhat unique joint recycled water program, also secured two external funding sources. In October 2004, the program received a \$5 million grant from the State Water Resources Control Board and in July 2005, the same agency provided a \$25 million loan.

With the first phase nearly complete, Baker saw this as an opportune time to retire. Sue Stephenson, DSRSD public information representative, said the district is happy with his service.

"He really had a terrific skill set to do this job," she said.

Baker's replacement will also be charged with coordinating program services and agreements among the water districts and other entities, as well as ensuring the successful use of federal funds to design and construct the second phase.

For more information about DERWA, visit <http://www.derwa.org>.

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