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96.9 City's Laguna Leaks

Editor: During the City Council meeting of Feb. 6 the question of the City's leaking sewer ponds was brought up. Mayor Ken Foley attempted to brush these leaks off as a non-problem even though the City had just received a Cease and Desist Order from the State Water Quality Control Board. He blamed the leaks on an "enormous amount of rain" despite the fact that at the time the ponds were first reported to be leaking Sebastopol had received less than normal rainfall for the year. Twelve inches of rain fills the pond by 12 inches whether it occurs in one day or 20 days. The reason that the sewer ponds were leaking is because they had leaks in them, this seems to me to be very simple to understand.

Mayor Foley then essentially accused me of trying to put Barlow, who is the only user of the ponds, out of business. I find Foley's political maneuvering extremely offensive. As chairman of the City's Laguna Park Implementation Committee, I have met with Barlow and discussed the use of the sewer ponds. It was my understanding from that meeting that Barlow was going to use pond #3 as long as he needed and that he did not need to use and would not be using pond #4. That seemed just fine to me.

Mayor Foley claims that I have a "problem" with Barlow using pond #3. Actually, what I do have a "problem" with is apple waste spilling into the Laguna. I am not the only one with this "problem." The state and federal government have a "problem" with waste being put into a wetland as well. In fact it is illegal. I have repeatedly warned the City that the pond's leaks could detrimentally impact the Laguna. Allowing apple waste to flow into the Laguna is a violation of state and federal clean water laws. In order to avoid a situation that could cause Barlow to go out of business the pond's leaks needed to be fixed. Violating state and federal laws could cause Barlow to be shut down by a government agency and a hefty fine levied against the City and/or Barlow. Additionally, I don't believe that it is right to be polluting our water supply or damaging the Laguna's ecosystem.

I also have a "problem" with the City's inability to deal with these spills and the leaking sewer ponds. In watching a video of the City Council meeting I noted that City Manager Paul Berlant described an October meeting between Barlow, the City and the Water Quality Control Board (WQCB) as resulting in the WQCB saying that "everything is OK." This meeting, at which I was also in attendance, was held to discuss the half million gallons of waste that was released into the Laguna last June 16. My recollection of this meeting was that since the WQCB did not have enough evidence to precisely identify the culprit they would not be pursuing civil or criminal prosecutions. However, it was my impression that the WQCB made it clear that this was a serious matter and that they would be monitoring Sebastopol closely. Perhaps Mr. Berlant feels that once the Public Works department didn't go to jail that "everything was OK". My impression of what the Water Quality Control Board said was "don't let it happen again."

I have yet another problem. Why weren't these leaks fixed immediately when they were first pointed out to the City? I showed Dave Baranzini, Supervisor of Public Works, last summer where these leaks were. When nothing was done, I repeatedly contacted the City to try and get the problem rectified. The leaks could have been fixed for a few hundred dollars. Instead, Barlow is spending tens of thousands of dollars on remedial measures and both the City and Barlow have been exposed to hundreds of thousands of dollars in potential fines.

Perhaps the reason these problems weren't rectified by City staff begins with Mayor Ken Foley's attitude.

Michael Kyes, Sebastopol

the Editor, but reserves the right to edit as necessary. Letters are preferred. Letters should be signed and must include a return address. Names may be withheld by request. If you have more to say, please contact the Editor. For more information, please contact the Editor at 823-7508. Our current address is 823-7945, fax: 823-7508.