

Valley Voices: A public trust can rely on private enterprise

By: Tony Penna

Oct. 17, 2015

Water service in Apple Valley is a public trust responsibly managed by a private enterprise called Ranchos. Private water companies, like Ranchos, have a well-documented, factual history of providing water service that protects the health and safety of the public while providing jobs, supporting the local economy, paying property taxes and supporting community events. Apple Valley's drinking water service and the infrastructure that provides it, has been entrusted to Ranchos for nearly 70 years.

Conversely, the Apple Valley town government continues to promote inaccurate information about Ranchos.

They seem intent on opposing a private, regulated enterprise by making incomplete and biased claims about Ranchos. When you read about the Apple Valley's town government's claims about Ranchos, ask yourself these questions:

Is the town government allowing the public to vote based on a detailed plan for a hostile takeover of Ranchos? Sadly, the public still has had no real voice in this long, costly and divisive effort by the Town government to acquire Ranchos through eminent domain. To gain public support, politicians like the ones on Apple Valley's Town Council almost always underestimate the time, money and expertise required to buy and operate a water utility by means of a hostile takeover. It appears the town government continues to ignore cautionary advice from the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association stating hostile takeovers of water systems invariably lead to higher rates for the same or worse service.

Is the town government ignoring unbiased evidence about their claims? The town government ignores independent reports that counter their biased view. For example, they called for a state audit of Ranchos which affirmed Ranchos' business model and revealed financial irregularities and questionable practices in Victorville. They ignored the very audit they asked for because it didn't make their case.

Is the town government spinning false narratives with partial facts? First there were false claims about Ranchos' rates for water service. Next, the town government's survey included nothing about the enormous legal and financial costs if they acquire Ranchos through eminent domain in a contested sale. Don't forget about the recent Transparency Report either. It raised more questions than it answered about more than nearly \$1.5 million spent and millions more budgeted for an attempted takeover of Ranchos. The town government doesn't even know how much they are obligating taxpayers to if they pay for the water system after an eminent domain fight. It's like Nancy Pelosi saying let's just pass the Affordable Care Act, then we'll see what's in it.

Is the town government playing the blame game? Look no further than our town government's gross mis-characterization of Ranchos when we terminated the discounted rates for water service at James Woody Park and the money-losing golf course. It was only after learning the town was drilling their own well and violating their agreement with Ranchos that we terminated the agreement to provide discounted water rates for public services.

The water service Ranchos provides is our main priority. We take our responsibility to provide high-quality water service as a matter of public trust just as we have for nearly 70 years.

— Tony Penna is vice president and general manager of Apple Valley Ranchos Water Company.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/article/20151017/OPINION/151019763/12966/OPINION>