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City, County Officials Assess Options Regarding Colorado Lagoon

By Kurt Helin

Editor

City and county officials are looking at their options in the wake of a judge's ruling regarding the Termino Avenue Storm Drain project.

Last week Superior Court Judge Dzintra Janavs ruled that parts of the environmental study were inadequate and had to be redone. That sent the issue back to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

Whatever happens, this will at least delay the project, said several people involved in the issue.

Third District Councilman Frank Colonna said he is trying to set up a meeting of city and county officials as well as other groups. He emphasized that he wants to see a version of the project go forward.

"My concern is that we need to have the county at the table because this is \$14 million in work," Colonna said.

The county plans to pick up the tab for the work and James Yang, the project director, said the county is still committed to the project.

Called the Termino Avenue Drain Project, the proposal is an expansion of an existing storm drain that starts near Redondo Avenue and Anaheim Street. That drain needs to expand to alleviate flooding in the Recreation Park residential area because the 50-year-old drain currently in place cannot handle the volume, city and county officials have said.

The project has been controversial because of the drain ending in Colorado Lagoon. The current drain dumps rainwater and, during summer months, any other water that flows into curbside drains, directly into the lagoon. Under the new plan, during summer months the "urban runoff" will be diverted into sewer lines.

However, during heavy rainstorms that new drain would bring water into the lagoon much faster. Leaders of the Friends of the Colorado Lagoon said that could lead to flooding at the lagoon and would upset the ecological system at the lagoon. County officials say that, with a diversion set up, the amount of water flowing into the lagoon at any time during a storm will be less than what happens now.

When the county approved the project, FOCL filed a writ of mandate — a legal action — to block the project from going forward because, the group said, the environmental work was inadequate.

Judge Janavs agreed at least in part with FOCL's claim. Her ruling focused on the culvert that connects Colorado Lagoon to Marine Stadium. In its environmental work, the county used the specifications from the culvert's construction. Surveys of the culvert showed that sediment build up, mussel growth and other factors have changed those dimensions.

The impacts of that smaller culvert — whether it could lead to flooding and environmental issues need to be studied further, Janavs said. That ultimately may include studies of the impact on fish, birds and other wildlife — both the California Department of Fish and Game and the National Marine Fisheries Service wrote Janavs expressing concern about the project.