

Residents seek say in water war

Initiative would allow vote on bonds to be used for Ranchos purchase

APPLE VALLEY — A ballot measure that would allow Apple Valley residents to vote on the town's use of bonds to acquire Apple Valley Ranchos' water system by eminent domain was submitted to the town clerk Monday, according to a statement released by the public relations firm Passantino Andersen Communications.

The measure was proposed by Apple Valley residents Chuck and Pat Hanson and would amend the Apple Valley municipal code to add a requirement that voters approve, by majority vote, "any public debt over \$10 million" that provides funds for the acquisition an enterprise, the statement said.

That "public debt" mentioned in the statement is in reference to bonds the town would likely use to fund the acquisition of Ranchos' water system by eminent domain, according to Passantino Andersen spokesman Randy Terrell.

Chuck and Pat Hanson have been vocal opponents of the Town Council's proposed acquisition of the water system.

"Whichever side you stand on the issue of eminent domain acquisition of Ranchos," Chuck Hanson said, "this initiative gives voters the right to weigh in on how much the Town is allowed to spend on the measure."

Passantino Andersen said it hopes the initiative will qualify for the November 2016 ballot, Terrell said.

The town has 15 days as of Monday, according to Terrell, to review the proposed initiative and return the title and summary back to Passantino Andersen.

"Based on what we've written," Terrell told the Daily Press, "(the town) will write the ballot summary and title and they get it back to us with the ability to collect the signatures. We have 180 days from that point (to collect signatures) and we need 10 percent of the registered voters in Apple Valley, which is approximately 3,600. We're looking to get more than that."

Town spokeswoman Kathie Martin was not available Monday afternoon to comment on the proposed ballot measure.

Informally referred to as the "Right to Vote on Debt Act," the measure is financially backed by Ranchos, according to Terrell; Ranchos General Manager Tony Penna called the ballot measure a common sense proposal in the statement released by Passantino Andersen.

"(The measure) merely provides the public a direct voice in a decision that will have major impacts for the future of Apple Valley," Penna said in the statement. "Many of our supporters have expressed concerns over the ultimate cost of eminent domain, and this initiative adds an important layer of accountability and transparency to the mountains of debt being proposed by the Town."

Byline: Matthew Cabe can be reached at MCabe@VVDailyPress.com or at 760-951-6254. Follow him on Twitter @DP_MatthewCabe.

Story published in the Dec. 21, 2015 issue of *The Daily Press*.