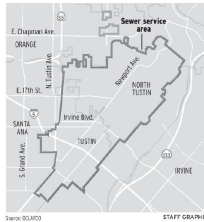
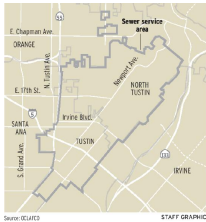


# ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Irvine Ranch Water gets edge in bid for Tustin area sewer service

By [BROOKE EDWARDS STAGGS](#)

2015-11-11 16:03:54



Irvine Ranch Water District just got the upper hand in a bid for 80,000 new customers.

Staff from the Orange County Local Area Formation Commission recently recommended allowing the Irvine water agency to take over sewer service for residents in western Tustin, North Tustin and El Modena, an unincorporated community near Orange.

East Orange County Water District also submitted an application to serve the area, drawing support from some local leaders and residents. However, LAFCO, which oversees boundary and governance changes, reviewed both applications and released a report endorsing Irvine Ranch Water for the job.

“Because of the district’s history of financial stability and the economies of scale that will be gained in terms of staffing and other resources, IRWD is the most logical local sewer provider,” the LAFCO staff report states.

Orange County Sanitation District has served the 7,800-acre area since 1985. Now the county agency wants to step away from local services to focus on countywide wastewater treatment.

That prompted the competing bids, with Irvine Ranch promising to lower rates by 50 percent while East Orange County Water pledged to lower them by 10 percent.

State law favors an existing agency expanding its service rather than a new one entering the field, the LAFCO analysis states. The report cites Irvine Ranch Water District’s 50-year experience handling sewer service, while East Orange County Water has only offered water service.

The final decision rests with the 11-member regional LAFCO.

Project manager Ben Legbandt said the vote will be pushed back until at least Dec. 9, since the county Board of Supervisors needs to first take action on related property tax changes.

**Contact the writer:** 714-796-7963 or [BStaggs@OCRegister.com](mailto:BStaggs@OCRegister.com)

# ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Letters: Irvine Ranch Water District preferred

2015-10-28 17:09:08

Re: "Agencies compete to take over sewer service in Tustin, North Tustin and Orange's El Modena" [News, Oct. 20]: All of this talk about water and sewage is now the hot topic for apartment owners in O.C. and, specifically, North Tustin. Who knew that such a small line item on a tax bill could have such a significant financial impact on so many members of the community?

Apartment complexes situated in North Tustin would especially benefit from Irvine Ranch Water District being awarded services to the area. Cutting my sewer rate by 50 percent would drastically reduce my property's operating expenses, and, by drastic, I mean saving an additional \$37,000 over the lifetime of the mortgage. Members of our association stand to individually save upward of \$275,000 over the same timeframe. If the O.C. Local Agency Formation Commission chooses East Orange County Water to provide North Tustin's sewer service, the potential savings will disappear.

Failing to select IRWD would hurt property owners and business operators. Saving 50 percent on our bills and having the more experienced provider in IRWD is the logical choice. If East Orange County Water could offer greater savings or even a superior, proven track record, then I would be willing to consider their services. But to cut our bills by 10 percent while choosing a provider with no sewage treatment experience is a bad idea for North Tustin and puts the health and safety of our employees, our residents and our youth at risk.

LAFCO owes it to this community to select the agency that can provide certainty with regard to rates, health and safety. Choose IRWD and let us all benefit from that decision.

**Nicholas Dunlap**

Santa Ana

President, Apartment Association of Orange County

### **The abridged version**

Re: "Private money running from the train" [Opinion, Oct. 23]: You're right to question the financial assumptions underlying the high-speed rail project. But, you really could have said it all in just one word: ARTIC!

**John T. Dzialo**

Fullerton

### **Cleaning out the hanger**

Re: "Fighter jets track military blimp drifting over Pennsylvania" [News, Oct. 28]: This runaway

blimp must be Speaker John Boehner's idea of "cleaning out the barn." That is, getting rid of another wasteful program.

**Rob Macfarlane**

Newport Beach

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OCRegister

## Agencies compete to take over sewer service in Tustin, North Tustin and Orange's El Modena

By [BROOKE EDWARDS STAGGS](#)

2015-10-20 14:06:37

Two agencies are competing for uncommon spoils: sewage.

Both East Orange County Water District and Irvine Ranch Water District have applied to take over sewer services for 80,000 people living in a swath of western Tustin, North Tustin and El Modena, an unincorporated community near Orange.

The good news is that both agencies are promising to cut rates for residents – one by 10 percent and the other by 50 percent, with different philosophies about how to finance maintenance of the area's 174 miles of pipeline.

"We've received a lot of feedback in support of both applications," said Ben Legbandt, who's overseeing the project for the Orange County Local Area Formation Commission, which directs boundary and governance changes.

LAFCO will hold a workshop Wednesday, Oct. 28, at Foothill High to present details on the competing applications and to solicit feedback before taking the issue to its regional commission for a vote.

### WHY THE CHANGE?

Orange County Sanitation District has served the 7,800-acre area since 1985. It's the largest area that still gets daily sewer service by OCSD, which wants to step away from local services to focus on countywide wastewater treatment, Legbandt said.

OCSD approached East Orange County Water District to take over sewer service for the area, and the two entered into an agreement in February 2014.

East Orange County Water has long provided daily service for nearly 1,200 customers in North Tustin, along with selling wholesale water to several agencies. But since the district has never provided sewer service before, LAFCO is required to review the application and determine which adjacent agency is the most logical provider, Legbandt said.

The city of Orange – which provides sewer service for its residents and may one day look to annex El Modena – was brought to the table. So was Tustin, which receives the rest of its sewer service from Irvine Ranch Water District. But the only other agency that submitted an application was Irvine Ranch Water District, which serves some 370,000 customers throughout central Orange County.

### DIFFERENCE IN PROPOSALS

East Orange County Water intends to cut rates by 10 percent the first year, which would save the

average homeowner \$21 annually. The district would then save money each month to build up its reserves and pay for system improvements in cash as needed.

"We're a pay-as-you-go agency," said Lisa Ohlund, general manager for the district. "We don't have any debt. We don't have unfunded pension liabilities."

Irvine Ranch Water intends to cut rates by 50 percent for the first five years, which would save homeowners \$108 annually. The district would then take out bonds to pay for improvements if needed, increasing rates by 2 percent annually starting the sixth year to keep up with inflation and cover any debt service.

"We can do it for half the price," said Paul Cook, general manager for Irvine Ranch Water. "It's just good governance."

Tustin, Orange and the Foothill Communities Association, a nonprofit serving North Tustin, have all written letters in support of East Orange County Water taking over service. They argue that the district is smaller and more local, already knows the service area and has a good customer service record.

Other residents and apartment complex owners who stand to save tens of thousands of dollars each year have spoken in support of Irvine Ranch Water. Arguments here include the district's record as the cheapest water provider in the county and that it has resources to handle maintenance and emergencies in-house rather than via a contractor, as East Orange County Water intends.

## WHAT'S NEXT

Following Wednesday's hearing, LAFCO staff will review all feedback and recommend one of the proposals for approval to the 11-member LAFCO commission, likely during their December hearing.

A change in service still requires a Board of Supervisors vote because of the property tax involved, a reconsideration period and a protest period. That means it will likely be at least late winter or early spring before a new agency takes over and reduced rates might kick in.

**Contact the writer:** 714-796-7963 or [BStaggs@OCRegister.com](mailto:BStaggs@OCRegister.com)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Verdant Volunteer

Dear Editor:

I was reading the article about Frank Estrada, the man who helps to clean up the Santiago Creek Trail and I wanted to give recognition to another Orange area resident. John Strand, another octogenarian, has been planting trees along the trail for the past several years and also helps to maintain them. We are lucky to have such great volunteers in our community!

Lisa Litman  
Orange

### Open up

Dear Editor:

I am hoping the *Foothills Sentry* will have something to write about the Maple Springs trailhead closure in Silverado Canyon. The closure is supposed to be lifted at the end of September, but the forest service is already signaling that it will extend the closure for another year. The forest service response to my inquiry was that the closure might be extended because of "safety concerns."

I have experience hiking in burn areas. There is nothing unsafe about it unless it is raining. Why can't the forest service copy the practical policy of our county parks? They close the park entrance when it rains, until the trails are dry. They don't close

the park for years, like the forest service does.

The forest service also cites the need to let a burn area recover. How do people hiking and biking on trails inhibit regrowth? We don't want vegetation growing on the trail, right?

Furthermore, the forest service seems to give no consideration as to how important the forest is to the physical, mental and economic health of the community. A lot of people don't like going to the gym or working out at home. Hiking or biking in the forest is the only kind of exercise they like. Every day the trailhead is closed is another day they don't exercise. A bit of exercise could be enough to prevent heart disease, high blood pressure and other common ailments, especially for older residents.

The trailhead closure also hurts local businesses, such as the Silverado Café and General Store. Things have been very slow for them this year. The trailhead brings in a lot of business for them.

Neal Lange  
Silverado

### Water wise

Dear Editor:

I plan to be at the Tustin Water Expo this Saturday wearing the following sign on my shirt. I wonder if the city will have the cops escort me out of the area.

*You can build and fill a new swimming pool but you can't keep your landscaping from dying. Is that fair?*

W.T. Foster  
North Tustin

### When praise is due

Dear Editor:

In this day and age, it's a big deal when a government agency delivers on its promises. Unfortunately, it so seldom occurs that when an agency lives up to its word, it truly should be a cause for celebration. Orange Park Acres is celebrating the Irvine Ranch Water District for delivering on the promises it made to our community.

In 2008, Orange Park Acres negotiated a consolidation of the Orange Park Acres Mutual Water Company and Irvine Ranch Water District. During our negotiations, IRWD promised to lower our water service costs, improve system reliability, fully integrate OPA into IRWD's service area and create an advisory committee of OPAMWC Board Members to work in partnership with IRWD board members so that we could stay actively engaged in IRWD's water service decisions for OPA.

IRWD kept every promise. Immediately our water rates dropped by 20 percent. And those rates dropped again by 10-20 percent, depending on lot size, a full year and a half earlier than expected because IRWD was able to speed up our system's integration into the larger IRWD network. Our system reliability was restored—even our water pressure increased—and our community remains actively engaged with IRWD executive staff and elected board members.

You know we in OPA are all neighbors, whether we live on the same street or a mile away. OPA has a unique and strong character that we intend on protecting. IRWD recognized and respected that character. While some initially thought that being included in the IRWD service area would mean we might have to paint all our homes beige to match those in Irvine, nothing could have been further from the truth. We've retained our community's character and independence while gaining a reliable, responsive, and less expensive government partner. Those currently involved in the

Local Agency Formation Commission decision regarding transfer of Orange County Sanitation District's Service Area 7 sewer service (*Fate of local sewer system postponed*, 9/1/15) would be well advised to look to the success of OPA's consolidation with IRWD to inform their opinions. IRWD maintained local control for OPA over its water system, it kept its promise about reducing water service costs, and it had the experience to eliminate the uncertainty we were sick and tired of living with.

OPA remains grateful for IRWD's partnership with our neighborhood. Thank you, IRWD, for keeping your promises!

Tom Davidson  
Orange Park Acres

### Indefinite definition

Dear Editor:

There is no debate about whether or not the Marywood New Homes project is infill. It is completely surrounded by a well-established community. That is the definition of "infill." The Draft Environmental Impact Report states clearly, "The proposed project is an infill project." The city attorney's office acknowledges that the language used in the City of Orange infill design guidelines does NOT exclude this project.

But the Design Review Committee Staff Report, dated July 15, states, "The project is not infill residential development." The reason given upon inquiry is the infill guidelines apply to small

scale subdivisions of four lots or less." And this is true. But there is no exclusionary language in the guidelines and expressly included is "new single-family residences". Plural.

The infill guidelines clearly state that the design objective is to "Achieve infill development and streets that are sensitively designed to respect existing residential patterns and development, and reinforce the character and functional relationships of existing neighborhoods," and that "Gated communities are discouraged within established predominantly non-gated neighborhoods."

These statements are not only directed at four houses. Four houses do not comprise streets—plural. And "gated communities" indicates something larger than four houses. The city's infill guidelines are intended to protect neighborhoods like Marywood Hills from the insertion of a gated new tract that simply does not fit.

By the selective application of guidelines, and by excluding our community from conformity standards, we all know would be met if 40 new homes were planned for Old Towne, the city and staff are selling us out to the will of the builder. According to the city attorney's office, this "exclusion" allows the developer to create his own "specific plan" as if he were building in an undeveloped area, and as if the citizens in the surrounding community of Marywood Hills do not exist.

Terrie Warner  
Orange

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