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Helix Water District Replaces Last Large Segment of Cast Iron Pipe From Lemon Grove's Water Distribution System

Helix Water District board president Joel Scalzitti operated the excavator this morning, lowering a segment of PVC pipe into the trench at the corner of Mt. Vernon Avenue and Golden Avenue in Lemon Grove. The pipe was signed by the Lemon Grove City Council and Helix Board, and its installation marks the removal of the last large segment of cast iron pipe in the water distribution system serving the city of Lemon Grove.

In addition to president Scalzitti, Helix board members Mark Gracyk, who represents Lemon Grove, and DeAna Verbeke were on site to mark the milestone in Helix's Cast Iron Pipe Replacement Project. Also on site were Lemon Grove assistant city manager and public works director Mike James, and Helix's general manager Carlos Lugo, director of engineering Jim Tomasulo and director of operations Kevin Miller.

"This is an important milestone for our engineering team and for our Lemon Grove customers," said Lugo. "Each segment of cast iron pipe we remove reduces the possibility of pipe breaks and service interruptions."

Cast iron pipe was the most commonly used pipe material in Helix's water distribution system from about 1926 to 1949. By 1959, Helix's system included 185 miles of cast iron pipe. In 1963, however, the number of leaks from the district's cast iron pipes reached 1.5 per 10 miles of pipe – just under 30 leaks a year.

In 1967, the district committed to replacing all cast iron pipe. In 2005, the board approved the Cast Iron Pipe Replacement Project for the replacement of the remaining 67 miles over the next 20 years.

The success of this project is largely due to a protocol developed by Helix's engineers for assessing and prioritizing which pipes to replace first, based on prior history of pipe breaks, soil conditions, water pressure in the pipe, and the potential for property damage if a break were to occur.

"The prioritization was effective," said Tomasulo. The number of cast iron pipe leaks per year dropped from 3.5 per 10 miles of pipe in 1973 to less than one per 10 miles of pipe in 1999.

Helix is replacing approximately 15,000 linear feet of cast iron pipe per year and, at this rate, will complete the program in 2026.

Video:

<https://youtu.be/p8YQvMPIL4o>

Shows Helix boardmembers and Lemon Grove assistant city manager Mike James, and Helix Board President Joel Scalzitti operating the excavator and lowering a segment of pvc pipe into the trench.

Photos:



From right: Helix Boardmember Mark Gracyk, who represents Lemon Grove, Boardmember DeAna Verbeke, Board President Joel Scalzitti and Lemon Grove assistant city manager and public works director Mike James.



Photo: Lemon Grove city council. From left: Councilmember Jerry Jones, Mayor Racquel Vasquez, Mayor Pro Tem Jennifer Mendoza, Councilmember David Arambula and Councilmember Matt Mendoza.