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## City-county water study a step toward regional approach

The Tucson region will flourish only if we marshal our joint resources and envision how the actions we take — or don't take — today will play out a generation from now.

Water is a prime example of this truth. Water is a finite resource, but one that smart communities use, recharge and recycle. How we manage the accumulation, use and reuse of water is fundamental to what our region will be in the future.

This is why negotiations between Tucson City Manager Mike Hein and Pima County Administrator Chuck Huckelberry are encouraging. The two are talking about conducting a study to create comprehensive regional water plan and the possibility of a regional water authority.

The Tucson City Council is set to vote on the study Feb. 20, according to a story by the Star's Rob O'Dell.

Water management in our region is complicated. Tucson Water is the largest provider of water, but Pima County operates the wastewater system. Add to that Central Arizona Project allocations and myriad other small- and medium-size private and municipal water providers and wastewater systems and the picture gets muddy in a hurry.

It's too early to say if a regional water authority is the best governmental apparatus to manage our water and help our community grow intelligently, but we need the big-picture regional approach.

Lack of a regional vision is evidenced by the legal wrangling between Marana and Pima County over wastewater and effluent. As the area grows and water becomes even more precious, the existing divided system will continue to break down.

Tucson Mayor Bob Walkup raised crucial questions that need answers in his State of the City address last week. Water isn't just a necessity for life, it's a commodity. He said our community must think about how much water it is willing to allocate for economic goals: What if a big employer that uses lots of water wants to come to Tucson: "How much water is each new job worth?"

Our community needs to consider how much water should go to residential growth and how much to commercial development. It needs to plan now so that future leaders aren't making vital decisions without an overarching vision of priorities and limits. The Hein-Huckelberry study is a step toward getting answers.

Encouraging signs of a unified effort are emerging in new alliances, like the Upper Santa Cruz Providers and Users Group. This group is a collection of water companies and sewer-system operators south of Tucson who've come together along with representatives of local golf courses, agricultural and mining customers, municipalities and developers.

The Tucson region's every-provider-for-itself approach should not continue. Such a haphazard system won't keep the area from growing but will keep our community from growing intelligently and sustainably.

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