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Published: 03.15.2008

## New ripples in water feud with Marana

**Town is willing to buy city lines; Tucson backs off**

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ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Marana says it's willing to meet the city's \$19 million asking price to buy Tucson's water lines inside the town.

But Tucson officials are already saying there's a catch: Marana must show it has the water to put into the system before Tucson will talk about selling the lines.

As recently as last month Tucson Water was in discussions about providing that water — 5,500 acre-feet on a year-to-year basis — to Marana, but city officials are now backing away from that offer.

Marana Town Manager Mike Reuwsaat sent a letter to the city, with copies to 12,000 Marana residents, Friday declaring Marana was ready to meet the city's \$18.9 million price for the potable- and reclaimed-water pipes.

Only hours later, Tucson City Manager Mike Hein shot back that Marana must first show it has the water rights to use the system before the two sides can talk about a sale.

Hein said he didn't know Tucson Water was negotiating to sell Marana the 5,500 acre-feet for roughly \$500,000, a move he attributed to trying to patch Tucson Water's annual budget.

E-mails obtained in a public records request by the Arizona Daily Star revealed Dennis Rule, Tucson Water administrator for intergovernmental relations, was negotiating with Marana officials to sell a portion of the city's Central Arizona Project water.

Another e-mail from Tucson Water Director David Modeer to Assistant City Manager Karen Masbruch said Modeer directed Rule to cease negotiating because Tucson Water no longer needed the budget fix.

"As you know, this effort was originally begun last year as we were struggling to meet debt service coverage for this fiscal year," noted Modeer's e-mail. "No further effort will be made until I meet with you and Mike for direction."

Modeer did not return phone calls this week.

Reuwsaat acknowledged negotiations had been going on to buy the 5,500 acre-feet of water at \$91 per acre-foot, but that Tucson nixed that offer a month ago and didn't give a reason. "Staff made the offer and staff withdrew it," he said.

The town sent the letter to Tucson, Reuwsaat said, because the town officials need to "discuss what the infrastructure involved is, and what the city's feeling is on resources." "Quite frankly, we need more information," he said.

Reuwsaat said he knows the \$18.9 million price Tucson quoted isn't likely to be the total amount of any acquisition. "That cost is just part of the cost," he said. "Does that include water? We haven't had that discussion. We have to talk to them still about water. You have to talk about the water resources."

Several City Council members said there was no way they would sell water rights to Marana permanently.

Councilwoman Regina Romero said she is opposed to selling water resources, as did Councilman Rodney Glassman.

Glassman said he understands why the city might consider a short-term deal, though.

Tucson isn't taking its full CAP allocation now, he said. If a severe shortage ever forces cutbacks, Tucson's reduced allocation would be based on what the city is actually using, and the Marana water would count toward Tucson's total.

Romero added that Marana has tried to play hardball with the city and Pima County in the hope of getting others to fix problems the town created for itself.

"They started growing and growing and growing without planning out these issues," Romero said. "They really have played hardball, but the reality is they are the ones with the needs. They are the ones with their hands out."

The spat between the two jurisdictions started with Marana's contention that it would send treated wastewater produced by Tucson Water to a new treatment plant in Pinal County. Marana officials said they would give Tucson its share of recharge credits for water sent to Pinal County, but city officials said the cost of returning the effluent for use in the Tucson basin would be prohibitive.

The town has been engaged in a series of blowups with Tucson and Pima County over water and sewer issues — filing a lawsuit asking a judge to let Marana take over the Pima County sewer system in the town and a nearby \$29 million county sewage-treatment plant. The Marana Town Council also met in closed session in October to consider suing Tucson over moving water lines for road improvements.

Reuwsaat said Marana could conceivably just acquire part of Tucson Water's Marana customers, and added he is a long way from making a recommendation to the Town Council. Tucson Water serves about 9,000 customers in Marana.

Ed Honea, Marana mayor, said the letter to 12,000 Marana residents was sent to keep them informed.

"We don't want anyone to say they didn't know," Honea said. "The citizens might come back to us and say, 'We don't want this.' ... Then we'll back off."

Hein said some at Tucson Water think \$18.9 million is too little for the water system, but he said he threw the number out in December so the two sides could talk about the bigger issue — where Marana is going to get its water supply.

"I didn't want to cloud the underlying most important issue, which is where is the water going to come from," Hein said as the reason he publicly announced the \$18.9 million price tag for the infrastructure.

Although water levels are rising in the aquifer underneath Marana as farm fields are retired, the town has just 1,528 acre-feet of renewable supply. An acre-foot of water serves two to three households for a year. Eventually, the town will have to offset all its groundwater pumping with recharge from a number of sources, including effluent.

Tucson Councilwoman Nina Trasoff said she does not want to consider the town's offer until Marana can demonstrate it has the potable and reclaimed water to run the system.

"Until they can demonstrate that, there's no point in even discussing the pipes," Trasoff said. "Let's get down to the basics first."

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