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TUCSON REGION

Regional plan on water set for next step

Joint city-county meeting to weigh idea's viability

By Andrea Kelly

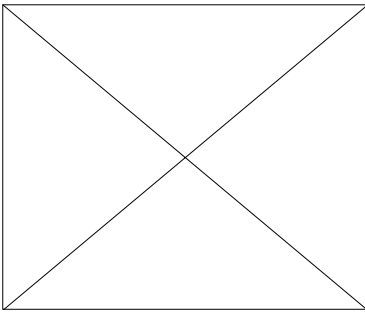
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Tucson, Arizona | Published: 01.11.2010

After nearly two years of city and county study on the future of water and wastewater systems here, the governments are getting ready to embark on a regional look at growth and water planning.

The city and county launched a study in April 2008 to assess their water and wastewater systems, set goals for a sustainable water future and collaborate in their planning. The results of the study will be presented to the Tucson City Council and the Pima County Board of Supervisors in a joint meeting Tuesday.

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If the elected officials agree to move forward, the city and county administrations have six months to come up with a specific plan, including a timeline and costs, for implementing the recommendations.

The numerous recommendations are broad and include such things as acquiring new, reliable water supplies, preserving riparian areas, directing growth to sustainable areas, integrating land-use planning with water planning, maximizing effluent use and increasing conservation.

The next phases of the regional water discussion would be to

assess the infrastructure and resources for all of the water and sewer providers in the metro area, beyond just Tucson Water and Pima County Wastewater; set regional policies; and finally, develop a sustainable water future.

The Pima Association of Governments may be asked to help coordinate all the water and sewer providers in the metro area for the next phase.

The organization already has staff members working on water-resources issues and committees dedicated to long-term planning, said Gary Hayes, PAG executive director.

Pima County and Tucson, along with the other providers, need to figure out how to manage the water future here, said Tucson Mayor Bob Walkup.

Because there are so many entities providing service, each with its own governing board, a regional water authority could be the best way to manage the resource in the future, Walkup said.

Pima County Supervisor Ramón Valadez said he wasn't ready to commit to a regional water authority similar to the Regional Transportation Authority, which oversees the voter-approved \$2 billion metro-area transportation plan.

"Water is a regional resource," Valadez said. "How we treat it as a regional resource is something I'm open to discussing and thinking about."

Creation of a water authority would be very complicated because of the technical issues, Hayes said.

"That's going to take some real delicate conversations on how we move in that direction," he said.

Representatives from Tucson Water and the Pima County Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department said they were ready to get direction from their elected officials, but that they're expecting to work closely with the other providers in the area for the next phase in the water study.

Tucson Water is ready to start preparing for several scenarios for the future, said Fernando Molina, department spokesman.

Contact reporter Andrea Kelly at 807-7790 or akelly@azstarnet.com

IF YOU GO

Who: Tucson City Council and Pima County Board of Supervisors.

What: Joint meeting on the city-county water and wastewater study.

When: 9 a.m.

Where: Pima County Board of Supervisors hearing room, 130 W. Congress St.

Why: The council and the board will consider supporting and implementing the planning recommendations.

More information: go online to www.tucsonpimawaterstudy.com or call 884-9477.

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