



P. O. BOX 86117 • TUCSON, ARIZONA 85754

October 21, 2008

Joint City/County Water/Wastewater Oversight Committee
Tucson Pima Water Study
PO Box 2344
Tucson, Az. 85701

Dear Committee Members,

The Tucson Mountains Association is the neighborhood association of record for a large area spanning portions of the City of Tucson, unincorporated Pima County, and Marana. It includes the area bounded on the north by Twin Peaks Road, on the east by Silverbell Road, on the south by the 22nd Street Alignment/Starr Pass Boulevard, and on the west by Saguaro National Park and Tucson Mountain Park. TMA has, as its mission, on the one hand, protection of the health and well-being of those who reside within our territory; and, on the other, protection of natural habitat, to preserve biological diversity in the Tucson Mountains and their foothills. These two sides of our mission can be on a collision course with one another, unless we can find a sustainable balance between density of development and available resources. We submit that the health and well-being of the entire population of the Tucson Region similarly depends upon this balance.

When this Committee was beginning its work, we asked that rainwater harvesting be added to the list of water resources to be inventoried. One of our members generously offered to allow City and County officials and this Committee to his home, to view a successful rainwater harvesting system which he and his wife have built nearly at the boundary of Saguaro National Park, where there is no public water supply. That system was built in 2003, during the current drought. Yet rainfall in recent years has been adequate to provide their reasonable household needs, including maintaining a swimming pool and small vegetable gardens (although they have a well that they use periodically, just to keep it in working order). To see this system in action, is to understand that it is possible to sustain our households on the water that falls from the sky, with scant recourse to our groundwater or imported river water. (Indeed, we think the owners of such a system are more fortunate than anyone depending upon CAP water, as rain water is free from pharmaceuticals.)

We pointed out, however, it is not sufficient for this Committee to view that 2003 system. What we need our City and County governments to do is to fully explore currently available

Letter to the Joint City/County Water/Waste Water Oversight Committee

October 22, 2008

page 2

rainwater harvesting technology, so that we can ascertain what amount of water can be harvested, what density of population per acre that available water can support, how best to store it, what is required to render it potable, and therefore how we can plan for the inevitable growth of our region.

Tucson is not merely a static city scratched into the desert. It is a center of engineers, scientists, architects, and planners of great vision. We need our City and County governments to take a leadership role, to convene our best minds, to develop alternatives to our current severely limited water supplies. For that matter, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation are likely sources of research. One thing we believe is needed, as we have stressed to the Joint City/County Water/Wastewater Oversight Committee, is a careful analysis of the costs and benefits of rainwater harvesting, both fiscally and ecologically. Protocols may include limiting density to the carrying capacity of the average local rainfall, or less, and proposed surface areas from which rainfall would be harvested. These could include, for example, solar panels with gutters to collect rain, and roofs of buildings and covered parking lots, from which water can be directed into cisterns that prevent evaporation. Much of that water is currently lost, in this region, to evaporation – by some estimates, more than half of the rain that falls from the sky is lost to evapotranspiration. But if we can harvest that water, entire developments may be able to supply their own needs, without seeking municipal supplies at all. If developers are unwilling or unable to develop such technology, then Tucson Water may need to evolve into a resource for planning, operating and maintaining systems, just as now they operate systems to deliver imported water to households.

Especially in light of recent threats of litigation over water rights, we must seize this opportunity to seriously consider ecologically responsible planning and development. We urge this Committee to recommend to the City and County governments that we explore the rainwater harvesting options fully and with urgency.

Thank you for the time and attention you have given to these crucially important matters. We recognize and appreciate that you are volunteers serving your community, and we hope your work will be fruitful.

Very truly yours,
TUCSON MOUNTAINS ASSOCIATION

By 
Judith D. Meyer, Its President

cc: Hon. Richard Elias, Hon. Sharon Bronson, Hon. Regina Romero, Hon. Bob Walkup
Chuck Huckelberry, Mike Hein