

City's alternative water plan takes step forward

April 10, 2008

By PAM ZUBECK

THE GAZETTE

Fremont County has agreed to ground rules for consideration of Colorado Springs' \$1 billion Southern Delivery System being built through its land.

That's key to giving the city an option if Pueblo County blocks the city from drawing water from Pueblo Reservoir, the city's preferred alternative.

Fremont County commissioners voted unanimously Tuesday to approve an intergovernmental agreement that will be considered by the Colorado Springs City Council on Wednesday.

The agreement calls for Colorado Springs Utilities to submit the project to Fremont County's land-use approval process if the city elects to draw water from the Arkansas River above Pueblo Reservoir. The intake would be near the Highway 115 bridge east of Florence.

"It's a real boon because we have additional options," said Utilities project manager John Fredell.

At issue is the city's plan to pump water from the reservoir to satisfy the city's needs through 2046.

Fremont County Commissioner Ed Norden emphasized the agreement doesn't mean the commission backs the Fremont alternative. Rather, it gives Fremont authority over zoning and other land-use decisions, he said.

"Having this agreement in place would allow the county some oversight on, perhaps, location of the intake and where the pipeline might actually be located," he said.

Norden said the agreement is a win for Fremont County because without it, Colorado Springs probably wouldn't be required to submit to the county's process.

Unlike Pueblo County, Fremont County doesn't have 1041 land-use regulations, named after the House bill that gave counties say over multijurisdictional projects.

The agreement requires the city to do more than just follow zoning and land use rules.

The city agreed to advance \$50,000 to Fremont County to pay for fees incurred during the review, which will begin soon. Fredell said the city plans to submit an application within a month.

It calls for "the parties together" to "identify and plan for the mitigation of impacts that may occur as a result of any proposed construction." That could include roads, bridges and other property.

Fredell couldn't attach a dollar figure to the pledge but said the pact is valuable in case Pueblo County doesn't allow the pipeline from the reservoir.

The Fremont plan calls for the pipeline to follow Highway 115 and cross Fort Carson before turning toward the northeast section of the city.

WATER PROJECT

THE PROJECT

- Dubbed the Southern Delivery System, the pipeline, two reservoirs and a water treatment plant would increase Colorado Springs' water supply by a third and satisfy the needs of the city and its partners - Fountain, Security and Pueblo West Metropolitan District - through 2046. The city seeks a 40-year contract with the Bureau of Reclamation, which operates Pueblo Reservoir.

A 66-inch pipeline, which would transport water the city already owns, would run roughly 43 miles to northeast Colorado Springs to a treatment plant. Jimmy Camp Creek Reservoir would be built later.

THE OBSTACLES

- Pueblo County officials have adopted land-use regulations, called 1041 rules after the House bill that created such authority, that Springs officials think hinder the project. City officials have said the rules would make the pipeline more expensive, time consuming and difficult to plan and build. Pueblo County commissioners have declined to comment.

WHAT'S NEXT

- The city has started "pre-application" talks with Pueblo County about a 1041 application. If the application isn't approved, the city could pursue the Fremont County option.