

No ire over conditions on pipeline

April 9, 2009 - 11:03 PM

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THE GAZETTE

There is apparently no outrage in Colorado Springs concerning the \$125 million string Pueblo County has attached to the approval to build a water pipeline from Pueblo Reservoir.

The Colorado Springs City Council held a hearing Thursday night on that county's conditions for approving the \$1.1 billion Southern Delivery System, a partnership with Fountain, Security and Pueblo West. It would bring 78 million gallons of water a day to two new reservoirs east of Security. Colorado Springs owns the rights.

About 90 people showed up. Of 11 who spoke, all but three praised the conditions, and several touted the pipeline as an economic - and even recreational - benefit for the reservoir on Upper Williams Creek.

Pueblo's major conditions for issuing a land-use permit are that Colorado Springs Utilities gives \$50 million to the new Fountain Creek Watershed District, a consortium of local governments and organizations working to improve the creek, and spends \$75 million on wastewater or water reuse improvements here by the end of 2024. Other conditions address construction and land acquisition, flows in the Arkansas River and restrict Colorado Springs from selling water outside the Arkansas Basin.

"We believe they are reasonable and they are appropriate," said Utilities CEO Jerry Forte. "We believe these conditions give us an opportunity to be responsible to our customers, our environment and our neighbors."

Five hearings held in Pueblo since December have seen contention, disagreement and hours of testimony by dozens of residents. Some there blame Colorado Springs for erosion, flooding and water-quality problems on Fountain Creek and see the pipeline as a water grab by its larger neighbor.

The tone was much different Thursday.

"We need to be good neighbors to Pueblo, and we believe the conditions outlined by Pueblo County commissioners ensure that will happen," said Dave Csintyan, CEO of the Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce.

"I am so proud that we are working together to fix Fountain Creek and turn it into an amenity," said Richard Skorman, a former Colorado Springs councilman. "The Pueblo County commissioners had every right to move forward in the way that they did and to make these requirements."

"What will be the cost, in terms of rate increase, for the people of Colorado Springs?" asked Walter Lawson. "This whole project is seen to rest on need and demand, which we know isn't there now and won't be for years."

The City Council will vote on the conditions Tuesday. The Pueblo County commissioners will then vote to issue a permit. Under the conditions, Utilities officials would have to begin construction within three years.