

Springs OKs county SDS rules

The route and timing of the pipeline project are not final.

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CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/CHRIS McLEAN -- Colorado Springs Mayor Lionel Rivera meets with council members (from left) Jan Martin, Tom Gallagher and Larry Small last week in Colorado Springs.

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COLORADO SPRINGS - Colorado Springs City Council cleared the way Tuesday for the Southern Delivery System to be built from Pueblo Dam by approving Pueblo County's terms and conditions for the \$1.1 billion pipeline project.

Now, Colorado Springs Utilities will spend the next few months evaluating the expense and scheduling of the Pueblo County route versus a fallback option in Fremont County to determine where the pipeline will go. Pueblo County commissioners are expected to give final approval to the 1041 permit next Tuesday.

Fremont County commissioners approved permits in February and continue to meet with Colorado Springs Utilities about the possibility of that route.

"We need to choose the route before the end of the year," Mayor Lionel Rivera said. "We're working on the alignment through El Paso County, so we have to know where we're coming in."

Although the decision hasn't been made, it sure sounded like the pipeline would come through Pueblo, however, with many calling Tuesday's vote "historic," including Rivera. "This is a new beginning for Pueblo and El Paso counties to work together for regional economic development," Rivera said.

Amid much hoopla - a bagpiper played in honor of Margaret Radford's last day on the board - the council voted 8-1 to approve Pueblo County's terms and conditions, which include \$50 million for Fountain Creek improvements and \$75 million in sewer fortifications. The entire list has 30 conditions which cover everything from construction impacts to road replacement to water quality monitoring.

"Utility systems don't get built by one generation," said Radford, who was hailed by Rivera and other council members as instrumental in gaining Pueblo's cooperation in a 2004 agreement that began thawing relations between the two cities. "The dream of a few became the heart's desire of so many."

That sentiment was shared by most of her fellow council members, with the exception of Tom Gallagher, who has all along criticized utilities for its tunnel vision in striving to develop the Pueblo Dam option.

"I believe this community will be here long after 2046," Gallagher said. "I don't think this solution will help future generations."

Gallagher remained skeptical that there is any doubt where the pipeline route will be.

"It's all smoke, because by committing \$125 million to meet the terms and conditions of Pueblo County, it locks us into place," Gallagher said.

Officially, that's not the case.

Council also voted to continue working with Fremont County to uphold commitments made earlier this year to obtain a permit for the fall-back version of SDS. Building the Fremont County route would be longer, more expensive and less reliable because it relies on a river intake rather than a reservoir. However, Pueblo County's conditions are more costly. Utilities staff made it clear its course has not been poured in concrete.

"This is not a decision on timing or alignment," said Bruce McCormick, chief of water services. "We are involved in a process of business review that will decide the cost, that will decide the timing."

Councilman Darryl Glenn voted in favor of Pueblo conditions after staff assured him that northern El Paso County communities would be able to use the pipeline for water supplies.

In his remarks at the meeting, Pueblo County Commissioner Jeff Chostner said northern El Paso County's use of the pipeline is fine, so long as water is not taken over the Palmer Divide into the South Platte basin.

Chostner also hailed the agreement as beneficial to Fountain Creek, pointing out that the money for improvements will not go to Pueblo County or Pueblo, but to the newly formed Fountain Creek Flood Control and Greenway District, a joint body that represents interests in both counties.

"Fountain Creek will not continue to be a no-man's land, but can become a true amenity," Chostner said. He also praised the benefits to the Arkansas River that would come of preserving the Pueblo flow agreement and regional cooperation. "I look to this as an opportunity for our communities to work together. . . . Let's move forward."

Pueblo's other commissioners also made brief statements at Tuesday's meeting.

"I hope our crystal ball is better than yours," John Cordova said, addressing Gallagher directly. "Today, the curtain between Pueblo and El Paso counties has been raised," said Anthony Nunez.

Colorado Springs Vice Mayor Larry Small, who attended many of the meetings that led to the creation of the Fountain Creek district, came closest to expressing a sense of atonement in accepting the Pueblo County conditions.

"With size, power and might comes responsibility," Small said, comparing Colorado Springs' role in the Arkansas River basin to the United States in international affairs. "We have not been as diligent on Fountain Creek as we should have been."