

Transcription from December 6, 2018 Mayor's Corner on the front page of the BLANCO COUNTY NEWS

I want to provide an update to the community on the status of the city's new wastewater treatment plant.

I recently met with representatives from TCEQ regarding the city's application to discharge treated wastewater.

The comment period for input was extended at request of State Rep. Jason Isaac. TCEQ reports that they received 700 comments or letters. And their staff must respond to each one. They note those with "standing" or a submission by someone living within seven miles of the discharge site.

TCEQ considers all timely filed requests for consideration and contested case hearings at its commissioners' agenda meetings. At these meetings, they decide whether they will grant or deny the requests. If the commissioners decide to grant a request for a contested case hearing, there are options for next steps including mediation to a hearing.

What I hope people know about the process is that the city researched plant design in order to build a state of the art wastewater treatment facility. We had to replace a failed 60 year old plant that was unable to serve our residents.

The new plant is a huge improvement in the quality of treated water produced and how wastewater is managed. We've been blessed with assistance by the Texas Water Development Board to fund the project with low interest loans that extend our ability to build a plant that uses the best technology available.

Municipalities currently have three options for the wastewater produced: discharge, land use and use of reclaimed water. TCEQ has a goal of putting water back into the rivers and preserve the US waterways. That's the legal framework we operate in today.

It doesn't matter where you live, all municipalities face this same challenge with the technology available today. For example, the city of Austin discharges 100 million gallons of treated wastewater daily into the Colorado River and its tributaries.

The work isn't done just because the plant went live. I've reached out to research organizations such as MCWE for help understanding the technology available so that what the city provides is state of the art and we look at merging technology options.

In drought prone areas such as El Paso, which currently relies on the shrinking water levels of the Rio Grande River and tapped aquifers, necessity is the mother of invention. The city has built a desalination plant that cost \$90 million to treat brackish water in the Hueco Bolson aquifer it relies on. The city projects that by 2030, desalination will produce 10 percent of its water supply.

According to the utility EP Water made a decision many years ago to think of reclaimed water as a valuable resource rather than a byproduct for disposal. El Paso Water is taking a step further by building a system to treat sewage water and turn it into drinking water called "direct potable reuse." They expect six percent of the city's water supply to come from advanced purification by 2030. They're going to make what Kevin Costner portrayed in the 1995 film "Water world" come true.

The innovation in El Paso comes with approval by its citizens. Efforts by other municipalities in Texas, Arizona, and California, ".... haven't gotten off the ground because of the 'ickiness' factor." What citizens want is important.

Water is a most precious commodity around the world, in the Hill country, and here in Blanco.

Our work isn't done.

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