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Chapter 10 – Public Participation in Developing the 2011 Region H Water Plan

10.1 Introduction

The Region H Water Planning Group (RHWPG) has sought to encourage public involvement and the participation of interested parties during the process of plan development so that any concerns could be addressed before the draft plan was completed. From its initial deliberations in preparing the 2001 Regional Water Plan, the RHWPG has made a commitment to an open planning process and has actively solicited public input and involvement in developing the elements of the 2011 Regional Water Plan (RWP). Securing a high level of public participation continues to be a challenge for long-term planning, even for a topic so vital to public well-being as the water supply, particularly if there is no drought. The attention of the news media in a major media market is rarely focused on continuing efforts that result in lengthy documents, no matter how important those documents may be to the region's future. Nevertheless, the RHWPG has reached out to communicate with the general public and especially with those segments of the population who will be most affected by the results of the regional water plan. This has been accomplished by pursuing several avenues to gain public involvement.

10.1.1 Regional Water Planning Group as Stakeholder Representatives

The first line of public involvement occurs through the membership of the Region H Water Planning Group. Each of the members of the RHWPG represent an interest category, such as river authority, agriculture, small businesses, general public, etc. They also represent the different geographic areas within this large region. Most of these members have linkages to the community through various organizations. These linkages, such as professional organizations or citizens groups, are the first avenue for taking information to the public and for receiving input to the RHWPG.

During development of the 2011 RWP, the RHWPG has met on the first Wednesday of the month at least quarterly, but often on a more frequent basis, so that interested parties can plan to attend and follow the proceedings. Notices of these meetings are posted in each of the counties in Region H and are e-mailed to a list of "interested persons" who have requested to be informed. The RHWPG maintains minutes of its meetings and places them on the Region H Water website for review, along with a multitude of other meeting resources.

10.1.2 Public Meetings during Plan Development

In addition to the August 2006 public hearing initiating the first biennium of the planning effort, the Region H Water Planning Group has held public meetings/hearings at several points in the planning process. Meeting formats encouraged discussion of the issues and in spite of the sparse turnout, those attending generally gave positive feedback. Summaries of the meetings and lists of attendees are included in this report.

This initial hearing in August 2006 began the development of special studies on environmental flows, drought management, and interruptible supplies. Another public hearing was held in May 2008 to initiate the second biennium of planning that would culminate in the development of the 2011 RWP. This meeting was held at the office of the San Jacinto River Authority in conjunction with a regular meeting of the RHWPG.

In May and July of 2009, meetings were again held at the San Jacinto River Authority offices. These were both morning meetings and focused on review and comment on the draft population projections prepared by the RHWPG with cooperation from the TWDB for use in preparing the 2011 RWP.

Additional information concerning public hearings associated with the public comment on the Initially Prepared Plan (IPP) will be added once these meetings are held following IPP submittal.

10.1.3 Targeted Meetings during Plan Development

Interaction with and updates to the 40-member Galveston Bay Freshwater Inflow Group (GBFIG) provided a forum for communication with environmental and conservation organizations and commercial and recreational fisher groups, as well as the GBFIG members from business and state and local agencies. GBFIG continues to work on developing management strategies for meeting the freshwater inflow targets that are endorsed in the 2001 and 2006 RWPs.

10.1.4 Public Notices and Press Releases

Media coverage was sought in conjunction with each series of public meetings or hearings. For each series, paid meeting notices were placed in fourteen newspapers providing service to all fifteen of the counties in Region H. Direct first-class mailings to county judges and mayors accompanied the issuance of public notices. Additional information regarding notice for the IPP will be added once these meetings are held.

10.1.5 Region H Water Website

A website was developed at the onset of the first biennium of the 2011 RWP in order to maintain a constant level of contact with the public and to provide members of the RHWPG with resources for plan development. The new site, Region H Water (<http://regionhwater.org>), provides visitors with background on the importance of water and conservation efforts as an overview of the regional planning process in Texas. The site also provides information and announcements for meetings of the RHWPG and downloads of past and in-progress RWPs.

10.1.6 Texas Water Development Board Website

The Region H Water Planning Group has taken advantage of the Internet site provided by TWDB on its home page (www.twdb.state.tx.us). Upcoming meetings, minutes of previous meetings, and contact information are posted. TWDB has posted a copy of the 2001 and 2006 RWPs on its site as well.

10.2 Summary of Public Hearing, August 2, 2006

A public hearing to receive comments on the proposed scope of work for the grant application to update the Region H Water Plan was held on August 2, 2006 at 10 a.m. as part of the regular meeting of the Region H Water Planning Group. The meeting was held at the San Jacinto River Authority offices in Conroe. Three individuals provided comments.

Mr. Brandt Mannchen of the Houston Sierra Club expressed that the Sierra Club has sixteen potential issues for the next round of planning. The top two consisted of the environmental flow needs and drought management strategies. Mr. Mannchen stated he would like to see a target for industrial water conservation, which is not currently part of the plan. He questioned if the agricultural water conservation goals could be attained, and he said he would like to see stronger municipal conservation plans.

Mr. Ken Kramer of the Lone Star Sierra Club echoed the comments of Mr. Mannchen on the issues on environmental flow needs and drought management strategies. As for the other two issues, he stated he had no objections to them. The municipal conservation plan was updated last year, and he would like to see a survey regarding municipal conservation.

Mr. Jerry Lovelady of the Porter Special Utility District commented on water conservation and stated that there are more opportunities available for more aggressive measures.

Table 10-1: Attendance at Public Hearing, August 2, 2006

2 August, 10:00 a.m., SJRA Offices, Conroe

Interested Public Speaking

Ken Kramer, Sierra Club, Lone Star Chapter

Jerry Lovelady, Porter SUD

Brandt Mannchen, Houston Sierra Club

Region H Water Planning Group Members

Reed Eichelberger for James Adams, SJRA

Roosevelt Alexander, Waller County

John Baker, BRA

John Bartos, Galveston Bay Fdn.

John Blount, Harris County

Robert Bruner, Walker County

Mark Evans, Trinity County

Jason Fluharty, Texas Genco

Tom Michel for Mary Alice Gonzalez, Fort Bend County

Jack Harris, Brazoria County

Robert Istre, GCWA

Jace Houston for Marvin Marcell, FBSD

James Morrison, Walker County Rural Water Supply Corp.

James Murray, ExxonMobil, Houston

Ron Neighbors, HGSD, Friendswood

Jimmie Schindewolf, NHCRWA

Jeff Taylor, City of Houston

William Teer, Leon County

Steve Tyler, Trinity County

Danny Vance, TRA

Harold Wallace, West Harris County WSC

Consulting Team

Jason Afinowicz, TCB

Glenda Callaway, Ekistics

Lucia Lee, KBR

David Parkhill, TC&B

10.3 Summary of Public Hearing, May 28, 2008

A public hearing to receive comments on the proposed scope of work for the grant application to update the Region H Water Plan was held on May 28, 2008 at 10 a.m. as part of the regular meeting of the Region H Water Planning Group. The meeting was held at the San Jacinto River Authority offices in Conroe. Six individuals provided comments.

Ken Kramer with the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club commented on the scope of work and complimented the Region H website. He voiced support for the supplemental funding request related to water conservation and encouraged the use of demand management to meet monthly or daily shortages. He also encouraged evaluation of successful water conservation plans in other regions to see how they compare with plans in Region H. He stated that the Sierra Club opposes Bédias Reservoir and that other strategies would be better.

Dan Davis expressed his appreciation for Region H's work. He expressed support for Bédias Reservoir and explained that it would mitigate issues related to the use of Lake Conroe surface water. He discussed the role of water conservation in future planning. He encouraged the legislature to fund research with the objective of determining an acceptable method of using treated effluent for direct injection into potable water treatment plants. Mr. Davis explained that he was a member of the Lake Conroe Communities Network and the Walden Community Improvement Association, and that he was a director on Montgomery County MUD 8, but that he was testifying in his individual capacity.

Jackie Chance commented on the environmental flows into Galveston Bay and the reduction of same when the groundwater conversion takes place and emphasized the need to study potential impacts. He encouraged the construction of more reservoirs and requested that TCEQ request drought contingency plans and water conservation plans from smaller systems also.

Jerry Fannin requested that Madison County have a representative on Region H. He expressed his concern regarding consideration of Bédias Reservoir as a potential management strategy.

Gerald Jozwiak, a Madison County resident, stated that he opposed the construction of Bédias Reservoir and wants it removed from Region H Plan completely. He commented on the wetlands, hardwood forests, wildlife, and the negative economic impacts on agriculture that this reservoir would have on their community. He echoed previous comments on the need to reduce the demand for water through conservation. He stated that additional reservoirs would not be needed if Montgomery County residents reduced their demand through conservation.

Art Henson, County Judge for Madison County, expressed opposition to Bedias Reservoir and requested that the impacts on agriculture and the local tax base be considered in planning for surface water. He requested a seat on the Region H Planning Group and stated that a formal request would be forthcoming.

Mike Reedy summarized written comments received from Ronald Rushing, Senator Robert Nichols, Representative Brandon Creighton, Angela Fannin, and Dan Davis.

Table 10-2: Attendance at Public Hearing, May 28, 2008

28 May, 10:00 a.m., SJRA Offices, Conroe

Interested Public

Jackie Chance, So. Montgomery County Area
Jerry Fannin, Madison County
Dan Davis, Lake Conroe Area
Art Henson, Madison County
Gerald Jozwiak, Madison County
Ken Kramer, Sierra Club, Lone Star Chapter

Other Members of the Public

Region H Water Planning Group Members

Roosevelt Alexander, Waller County
John Baker, BRA
John Bartos, Galveston Bay Fdn.
John Blount, Harris County
Robert Bruner, Walker County
Reed Eichelberger, SJRA
Mark Evans, Trinity County
Jason Fluharty, Texas Genco
Jack Harris, Brazoria County
Bob Hebert, Fort Bend County
Robert Istre, GCWA
Ron Neighbors, HGSD
Jimmie Schindewolf, NHCRWA
Jeff Taylor, City of Houston
William Teer, Leon County
Steve Tyler, Trinity County
Mike Uhl, DOW
Danny Vance, TRA
Harold Wallace, West Harris County WSC

Pudge Wilcox, CLCND

Consulting Team

Jason Afinowicz, TCB

Glenda Callaway, Ekistics

Chris Krueger, KBR

Mike Reedy, TCB

10.4 Summary of Public Meeting, May 6, 2009

A public meeting to approve population and water demand projections was held on May 6, 2009 at 10 a.m. as part of the regular meeting of the Region H Water Planning Group. The meeting was held at the San Jacinto River Authority offices in Conroe. One member of the public provided comment on the proposed projections.

Mike Reedy with AECOM reviewed the current schedule for preparing the 2011 Regional Water Plan. He then turned the presentation over to Jason Afinowicz with AECOM to present the results of the population and water demand projection analysis (Task 2), including the steam-electric demands, population projections, and municipal water demands.

Brandt Mannchen commented on the proposed population and water demand projections that will be used in preparing the revised Region H Water Plan. He distributed a written summary of his comments and then briefly summarized his thoughts on the availability and clarity of the information, the public comment period, and the process in general. Mr. Mannchen encouraged the group to withdraw the submittal of revised population and water demand projections until the public policy issues of population growth and economic growth can be debated. Harold Wallace inquired as to what evidence was available to reflect that the information that the consultant provided was inaccurate, and Mr. Mannchen responded that more time was needed to evaluate the available information.

Discussion ensued regarding questions and concerns related to the population projections for the City of Richmond, the City of Huntsville, and the information related to the demand projections for steam electric power. Ron Neighbors asked about the process for partially approving the population and water demand projections and approving the modifications in the future. Temple McKinnon stated that modifications would require the same process for approval if excluded. Ted Long commented on the steam electric power numbers for Fort Bend County and Galveston County; he will review historical records and get back with Mike Reedy with his findings.

Robert Istre inquired as to the source of the information presented, and Temple McKinnon responded that the regional and county totals are based on the State Data Center's information. John Bartos encouraged the consultants to comment on Mr. Mannchen's questions and concerns, and Mike Reedy confirmed that this would be done. Steve Tyler inquired as to how the projected population and demand numbers compared to the availability of water. Carol Reed with the City of Huntsville briefly discussed the potential growth of the Huntsville area. She stated that Huntsville has already exceeded the 2010 projected water demand numbers and the per capita use is increasing.

Mike Reedy made the recommendation that approval be given for the submittal of revised population and water demand projections to the TWDB as presented, excluding those for the City of Huntsville,

City of Richmond, and the steam electric demands. Motion was made by Roosevelt Alexander to approve the population and water demand projections as presented, excluding those for the City of Huntsville, City of Richmond, and steam electric demands for Fort Bend and Galveston counties; seconded by Robert Bruner. The motion was approved with one nay vote. Steve Tyler voted nay.

Table 10-3: Attendance at Public Hearing, May 6, 2009

6 May, 10:00 a.m., SJRA Offices, Conroe

Interested Public Speaking

Brandt Mannchen, Houston Sierra Club

Carol Reed, City of Huntsville

Other Members of the Public

Carol Reed, City of Huntsville

Region H Water Planning Group Members

Roosevelt Alexander, Waller County

John Bartos, Galveston Bay Fdn.

John Blount, Harris County

Robert Bruner, Walker County

Jun Chang, City of Houston

Reed Eichelberger, SJRA

John Hofmann, BRA

John Howard, Austin County

Mike O'Connell for Bob Hebert, Fort Bend County

Robert Istre, GCWA

Ted Long, NRG

Tom Michel for Marvin Marcel, FBSD

James Morrison, Walker County Rural Water Supply Corp.

Ron Neighbors, HGSD

Paul Nelson for Jimmie Schindewolf, NHCRWA

William Teer, Leon County

Steve Tyler, Trinity County

Danny Vance, TRA

Harold Wallace, West Harris County WSC

Pudge Wilcox, CLCND

Consulting Team

Jason Afinowicz, AECOM

Glenda Callaway, Ekistics

Karim El Kheishy, KBR

Chris Krueger, KBR

Mike Reedy, AECOM

10.5 Summary of Public Meeting, July 1, 2009

A public meeting to approve population and water demand projections was held on July 1, 2009 at 10 a.m. as part of the regular meeting of the Region H Water Planning Group. The meeting was held at the San Jacinto River Authority offices in Conroe. One member of the public provided comment on the proposed projections.

Brandt Mannchen commented on the population and water demand projections. Mr. Mannchen distributed a summary of his personal comments related to water planning and management. He urged Region H to reduce water demand through conservation, and he emphasized the need to determine the sustainable population in each watershed and to provide water for that population.

A presentation by Jason Afinowicz covered the revised population and demand projections for the City of Huntsville, the City of Richmond, North Fort Bend Water Authority, and steam-electric demands for Fort Bend County. Mr. Afinowicz discussed the outstanding issues with each and efforts made to address each of them. Discussion ensued regarding the Texas Water Development Board's consistent under-projection of population in Fort Bend County. Discussion was led by Ron Neighbors, Marvin Marcell, John Hofmann, and David Parkhill on the planning process and the need to be able to address concerns as part of the planning process. A suggestion was made by the group and confirmed by Mark Evans that language needed to be included in the Chapter 2 narrative to clearly state the group's reasons for preferring a higher number for Fort Bend's population and also to state the group's disagreement with the TWDB's required population number. An additional suggestion was made to include alternative management strategies to address the under-projections. Temple McKinnon commented that TWDB is bound to statewide numbers provided by the State Data Center, which does not allow for county increases. She explained TWDB's approach and said that the 2010 Census will provide the next opportunity for significant changes to be made. Mr. Afinowicz continued with his presentation by responding to Brandt Mannchen's previous request for more information related to population and water demand projections.

Brandt Mannchen stated that he was in agreement with Marvin Marcell's comments during the discussion related to population projections. He commented on the need to look back at previous projections and ways to improve in the future.

Motion was made by Ron Neighbors to approve the recommended population and water demand projections with direction to the consultant team to include the language stated as a caveat on the Fort Bend numbers; seconded by Harold Wallace. The motion was approved with two nay votes. Marvin Marcell and Bob Hebert voted nay.

Table 10-4: Attendance at Public Hearing, July 1, 2009

1 July, 10:00 a.m., SJRA Offices, Conroe

Interested Public Speaking

Brandt Mannchen, Houston Sierra Club

Other Members of the Public

Region H Water Planning Group Members

John Bartos, Galveston Bay Fdn.

John Blount, Harris County

Robert Bruner, Walker County

Lisa Lattu for Jun Chang, City of Houston

Reed Eichelberger, SJRA

John Hofmann, BRA

Lloyd Behm for John Howard, Austin County

Bob Hebert, Fort Bend County

Robert Istre, GCWA

Glynn Leiper, Exxon-Mobil

Ted Long, NRG

Marvin Marcel, FBSD

James Morrison, Walker County Rural Water
Supply Corp.

Ron Neighbors, HGSD

Jimmie Schindewolf, NHCRWA

William Teer, Leon County

Steve Tyler, Trinity County

Gena Leathers for Mike Uhl, DOW

Danny Vance, TRA

Harold Wallace, West Harris County WSC

Pudge Wilcox, CLCND

Consulting Team

Jason Afinowicz, AECOM

Glenda Callaway, Ekistics

Karim El Kheiashy, KBR

Chris Krueger, KBR

David Parkhill, AECOM

10.6 Public Review and Comment on Initially Prepared Plan

Additional information concerning public hearings associated with the public comment on the Initially Prepared Plan (IPP) will be added once these meetings are held following IPP submittal.

10.7 Summary of Public Hearings, Public Meetings, and Written Comments

Additional information concerning public hearings associated with the public comment on the Initially Prepared Plan (IPP) will be added once these meetings are held following IPP submittal.