

## Abilene Reporter News

# Future water won't be cheap

By Doug Myers

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Abilene's next major water source won't come cheap.

Building the proposed Cedar Ridge Reservoir in Throckmorton County will cost an estimated \$192 million, while building pipelines and treatment plants to get water from Possum Kingdom Lake would cost an estimated \$166 million.

Abilene City Council members were updated during a workshop Thursday on the city's options for a long-term water supply.

Despite its higher initial cost, council members seemed to favor the Cedar Ridge project. If the dam is built, though, operating costs would be almost \$3 million a year cheaper than getting water from Possum Kingdom.

"There's no doubt in the my mind that the Cedar Ridge project is the best process," councilman Sam Chase said.

Chase said getting water from Possum Kingdom wouldn't be, in his opinion, "what's best for our children and grandchildren." He said Cedar Ridge would provide better water that would be easier to treat and provide more accessibility for Abilenians, with the potential for recreational usage.

Mayor Norm Archibald said the city would own Cedar Ridge and be the lessee at Possum Kingdom.

"One you're renting; one you own," consultant Scott Hibbs -- of Enprotec/Hibbs & Todd Inc. -- told council members, referring to Cedar Ridge and Possum Kingdom.

While no action could be taken in the workshop Thursday, Archibald said the goal is for the council in June to consider a resolution that spells out a "game plan" -- a strategy of how to best address the city's future water needs that strongly includes the Cedar Ridge Project.

"For Abilene to move forward, we've got to be considered a regional water supplier" by the state, Archibald said, explaining the city should take the lead in helping solve the area's water needs.

Hibbs said projections are the Abilene area will face a water deficit of 12,000 acre-feet per year by 2060 if no new sources are developed.

An acre-foot is 325,651 gallons, the amount of water it would take to cover an acre of land with a foot of water.

The current water supply need is about 40,000 acre-feet per year, according to city consultants. Whereas the annual cost for operating water treatment activities at Possum Kingdom would be an estimated \$21 million a year, the cost for Cedar Ridge would be \$18 million, information provided to the council indicates. Possum Kingdom is the largest lake within 100 miles of Abilene, but the water is not drinkable because of its salt content. New water treatment technology is available but more expensive than treating water from Lake Fort Phantom Hill or Hubbard Creek Reservoir, two of the city's water supplies. The city built a reverse osmosis plant for treating water from Ivie Reservoir, the city's third water supply. According to Reporter-News archives, Abilene paid about \$11 million to build the reservoir and about \$60 million to build a pipeline and water treatment plant. The city pays off water projects through water bills.

Under the best-case scenario, consultants said the Cedar Ridge Reservoir likely wouldn't open until 2020, possibly 2025.

Archibald called the effort "a marathon" that will take many years to complete.

Consultants also recommended the city continue to look at a number of alternative water management strategies, including preserving the option of purchasing up to 20,000 acre-feet per year on or before March 10, 2015, from Possum Kingdom, exploring pumping treated wastewater into Lake Fort Phantom Hill, evaluating the expansion of Hargesheimer Water Treatment Plant for full use of city's Ivie Reservoir Water Supply, and evaluating the feasibility of using area groundwater supplies.

These alternative strategies, consultants said, would cost \$700,000 to \$800,000 through 2013.

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