

City wants special use tax

By J.D. STETSON, News-Record Writer

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With a quarter-cent special purpose tax paying for the Wyoming Center at Cam-plex coming to its end by November, the City of Gillette could push for keeping the tax to pay for a new water pipeline.

City officials broached the subject to Campbell County commissioners Tuesday in a joint meeting between the two entities to discuss the city's endeavor to build a new 42-mile Madison pipeline and the prospects of a regional water system. The Wyoming Water Development Commission is studying Gillette, Moorcroft, Rozet and outlying subdivisions with the thought of regionalizing the water system.

City Administrator Bret Jones said that with the Wyoming Center tax ending in November it is imperative that local governments begin discussing that option. A decision must be made before an August deadline for items that need to go on the November general election ballot.

"Now is not too soon to start (discussions)," Jones said.

Other ways to pay for the project include raising water rates and seeking direct funding from the state Legislature. But County Administrator Bob Palmer said the amounts from each of those possibilities should be calculated in time for the August deadline.

The pipeline is estimated to cost \$170 million.

Voters approved a \$22 million capital facilities tax in May 2005 to build the Wyoming Center at Cam-plex.

Councilman Mike McInerney thought the Town of Wright might have a problem with the tax because it would be paying for the pipeline and not be able to reap the benefits, whereas people in Crook County would reap the benefits without paying the tax.

But Mayor Duane Evenson pointed out that the minerals industry pays most of the money for the tax, not the citizens.

The city's preliminary plan to regionalize the water system would allow the city to operate the entire system and maintain control of the city portion. But it would create a rural water district to oversee and set rates for the rural system.

Commissioner Craig Mader questioned whether it would be a true regional system if the city maintained full control of the operations.

Jones said that nothing has been ruled out because a \$300,000 regional master plan being done by the water development commission won't start until July. But the city has looked into models of other regional organizations and has been told that joint powers water boards have had problems in other communities.

The city will approach the state Legislature about funding the project. Jones believes that they should start now to get as much information as possible about the need for the water to all of the state senators and representatives as well as arm the Campbell County delegation to debate the issue next January.

KEEPING TRACK

- What's the problem?: A study conducted by engineering firm Morrison-Maierle Inc. of Billings, Mont., yielded the city's preferred option to build a new pipeline from the Madison well field 42 miles east of Gillette to meet peak-day water demand over the next 30 years. The project could cost more than \$170 million.

- How will they get the money?: The city approached the Wyoming Water Development Commission last year to help with the cost of the pipeline, but turned down. The commission recommended seeking the money directly from the state Legislature. Other options to pay for the pipeline are increasing water rates, seeking contributions from other local governments and creating a special purpose tax.

- In the meantime: The water commission initiated a \$300,000 master plan to explore what it would take to create a regional water system that could include outlying subdivisions, Rozet, Moorcroft and other parts of Crook County. The city is exploring temporary measures to keep up with demand that include re-drilling wells, treating water and conservation.