

Council's project list includes water protection funding

BY CARRIE HADERLIE / BOOMERANG • WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2010

The city plans to allocate about one million of its \$27.7 million in projected revenue from a countywide specific purpose tax to aquifer protection, but one city councilor said that is not enough.

At a special meeting Tuesday, the Laramie City Council approved a finalized project list for the anticipated specific purpose tax revenue allocating money to water, sewer, street, aquifer protection and solid waste improvements and bonding costs, assuming the tax is approved by Albany County voters this May.

"We have a problem in this city that is of a very significant extent," Councilor Erik Molvar said when presented with three options for allocation of funding: The first being allocation of \$250,000 to Casper Aquifer protection, the second being allocation of \$500,000 to aquifer protection and the third being allocation of \$1.8 million to aquifer protection.

"We have contamination and pollution going from septic tanks today into our water supply that we know about. I don't appreciate having sewage in our drinking water supply, and I don't think that anyone else who drinks the water in this town does either," Molvar said, proposing that the council allocate the most money possible to aquifer protection.

"I really don't appreciate the council, or at least some members of the council, trying to shrink from our responsibility to protect our water supply," Molvar said.

After an amendment to the \$500,000 option by Councilor Scott Mullner, the council voted seven to two to adopt a resolution that would allocate \$1 million to aquifer protection. Molvar voted against the motion because he said it would not allocate enough to aquifer protection and Councilor Dee Mickelson voted against the motion because he said it allocated too much to aquifer protection.

Councilor Joe Vitale said he was offended Molvar said other councilors did not care about aquifer protection.

"I believe in aquifer protection. Our original intent was to purchase land to protect the well heads, which provide 60 percent of the water to our city," Vitale said.

"To make statements that this council does not care about the protecting the aquifer, I think, is irresponsible. This council does care about the aquifer. Our No. 1 one step is to protect our well heads right now, which are the most vulnerable," Vitale said.

The \$1 million in aquifer protection funding will go to purchase property surrounding the well heads in Zone One and to purchase vulnerable features in Zone Two of the Casper Aquifer Protection Zone as defined in the Casper Aquifer Protection Plan, according to City Manager Janine Jordan.

Vitale said other projects in the city take priority over aquifer protection at this time, specifically, he said, street infrastructure repair should collect the majority of the tax revenue.

"Number one priority (for the tax revenue) is infrastructure," he said.

Also present were Mayor Jodi Guerin and councilors Klaus Hanson, Joe Shumway, Bryan Shuster and Karl McCracken.

The city will propose that the rest of the funding be allocated to:

- n \$8,067,960 to water infrastructure projects,
- n \$5,950,000 to sewer infrastructure projects,
- n \$4,900,000 to street infrastructure projects,
- n \$3,450,000 to solid waste and landfill projects,
- n \$4,352,040 to bonding costs for the above projects.

The councilors discussed allocating \$500,000 to the Laramie Regional Airport board for expansion at the airport, but voted that idea down.

Albany County voters will have to vote on the specific purpose tax ballot, with city projects included as listed above, in a special election in May.

Because all the voters in Albany County will vote on the specific purpose tax, the Town of Rock River and the Albany County Commission will receive a significant portion of the funding from the projected tax revenue. The county and Rock River are compiling their own lists of projects for their share of the revenue, and the city, the county and Rock River will have to approve a final joint resolution with the language that will go on the ballot in May before March 1.

The council will likely vote on that resolution Feb. 24, according to the city manager.

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