

It's down to the details with \$226M Madison water pipeline

By ALEXANDRA SUKHOMLINOVA, News-Record Writer asukhomlinova@gilletteNewsRecord.net

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After all that's been said and done about the \$226 million second Madison pipeline, the big picture of the project is clear, but a lot of questions about the small picture still remain unanswered.

Most of those questions have to do with how the rural improvement and service districts will be involved in the project. For the cost of the pipeline, the project has to have regional approach.

It's not just about providing water, said Michael Purcell, director of the Wyoming Water Development Commission, at a meeting with city and county officials Tuesday. The political reality of the project is that it's about planning.

The entities involved in the project, including the company that did the study for the Madison project, met Tuesday to discuss the details and the approaching agreement between the city and the county. Both entities will have to create the document by the end of October before engineering of the project begins and before state committees meet to discuss the project's funding.

That will give all the parties involved time to research the issues and the districts will "get a real chance of transparency," said Jeff Raney with the Central Campbell Improvement and Service District.

The districts earlier were worried that the city and county wanted to exclude the districts from the process of setting up the regional supply. Raney said earlier the city wasn't interested in their input and was more about power consolidation than about serving the entire population of the county. One way to bring more openness to the process is to establish an entity similar to the public service commission that will review the water rates and provide oversight, said Kevin King, Campbell County public works director.

King views transparency of water rates as one of the areas that need to be addressed in the later discussions along with the service area and education about the benefits of being a part of the regional system, which will be voluntary.

The service area, which remains the hot topic, needs to be approached as a planning tool rather than a line on the map, King said.

If a district falls within the service area, it may need to hook up to the system. If not, it may form its own well, he said.

The preliminary service area boundary now encompasses the area from slightly east of Rozet to the Eight Mile subdivision west of Gillette. It could stretch as far as to encompass Pine Haven.

King's points lined up with the worries of the districts, Raney said.

"I think we have some light at the end of the tunnel. Three months ago you couldn't get the day and time out of them. Now we have everything around the table," he said, adding that he's more optimistic about the discussion between the districts and local governments now.

About 14 districts formed a joint powers board and hired an attorney to make sure that the interests of the districts are protected.

About 12 districts from that board were present at the meeting.

Here are some of the issues that the districts are worried about:

- Time frame: "Some of the systems are going to have the need before that time and some of the other issues will come into play, too," said Loren Crain, president of Wyoming Rural Water.

It will take about five years to build the pipeline based on the original plan, but it will depend on the economy and particularly the price on natural gas, Purcell said. Taxes on minerals help pay the state's bills.

- Cost of expansion: The \$230 million doesn't include the cost of expanding the water system to the districts and rural water systems. Most of it — \$151 million — will be paid by the state. The rest of the cost is expected to be paid by a capital facility tax but the tax can't be set up until the county and the city know how much they need to raise to pay for expansion. That figure will depend on how many districts are willing to be a part of the system, county officials

explained.

- **Hydraulics:** It will depend on how many districts want to be hooked up to the system.

Some districts would prefer to have their own water systems than receive already treated water. They will be able to chose the service they want, WWDC officials explained.

- **Water systems:** Some rural water systems, such as Nickelson Little Farms, are worried that they won't be included in the system because they aren't formed as a district. Alternatives to provide water to them can be figured, HDR officials said.