

Special City Council meeting turns focus to drought

Written by By Rick Abasta Sun Correspondent
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The July 24 special meeting of the Gallup City Council was a work session covered the city drought contingency plan, Cecil Garcia Fitness Center rehabilitation project, and the conceptual design report of the Red Rock Park RV Campground reconstruction project.

The main focus, however, was on the drought.

Evan Williams, deputy director of Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments, said four meetings were conducted before the drought contingency plan was written.

According to the 88-page report, Gallup is dependent upon groundwater, averaging 3.37 million gallons of water per day. Groundwater levels have dropped 200-feet over the past decade and is not expected to meet current water needs.

“We’ve gone through a large public involvement process. We’ve had some great stakeholders, especially from our neighbors at the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources,” Williams

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said.

Jim Homey of Jacobs Engineering Group Inc. said he has worked closely with the Drought Task Force, which is comprised of representatives from the city, Navajo Nation and McKinley County.

He said the taskforce convened four times to develop the current drought contingency plan.

“At this point, we want city council input to be able to finalize this plan. The drought contingency plan is basically a pre-prescriptive layout based on the Bureau of Reclamation format,” Homey said.

The drought contingency plan includes an introduction, drought monitoring, vulnerability assessment, drought mitigation actions, drought response actions, operational and administrative teamwork, and plan update process.

He said, “We’re looking at three current indicators: U.S. Drought Monitor, Drought Severity Index and the West Region Climate Center SPI (Standard Precipitation Index).”

Homey said the SPI was a recent addition in order to match up data with the Navajo Nation drought monitoring practices.

He said future indicators, once the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project (NGWSP) is completed in 2024 will include the stream flow of the San Juan River, snow pack of the San Juan River Basin and water levels at the Navajo Reservoir.

The drought stage index is rated from zero to four. Zero is no drought, followed by potential for drought, moderate drought, severe drought, and extreme drought.

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The vulnerability assessment identified non-essential outdoor type watering such as washing your car at home, lawn maintenance, industrial car washes, swimming pools, industrial laundry, restaurants, construction and other activities.

Currently, the city averages 6,500 gallons per month for an average four-person household. In the past 10 years, Gallup has twice reached stages three and four of the drought monitoring index.

“This is looking at where the city would be most vulnerable in the event of a drought and essentially what the city would prioritize in terms of what would get put on the chopping block first,” Homey said.

Essential assets for water would include fire suppression, residential indoor water use, critical healthcare facilities, and government and institutional indoor use. Secondary assets include commercial and industrial indoor use.

Twelve mitigation actions were identified, including construction of the NGWSP, developing wells and purchasing additional ground water rights, direct potable reuse, aquifer storage and recovery, water rate structure to encourage conservation, meter condition assessment and replacement, leak detection, water conservation rebates, conservation public outreach, new construction standards, and rainwater harvesting.

“Monitoring will tell you what stage you’re at,” Homey said.

Councilor Yogash Kumar raised a question about water use at the city golf course.

“I know that we use affluent water at our golf course. How much of that do we let go into the perky?” he asked.

Right now, we’re processing about 2.1 million gallons per day and we’re sending about 600,000

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to the golf course on peak times, replied Dennis Romero.

“The rest of that never get used, i.e. the construction water that we were talking about, so we’re sending about 1.4 million gallons into the Puerco per day,” he said. “There’s opportunity to re-use that as well.”

City manager Maryann Ustick asked, “Do you have any other cities in New Mexico that have adopted this?”

Farmington has adopted the drought contingency plan and recently dropped from three to a two on the drought stage index, replied Homey.

Mayor Jackie McKinney asked, “Where do we go with this, the humanitarian part of the amount of water that we sell at our watering stations to the people that come into the city?”

He said they buy water for their home site and to provide water to their livestock.

“This will come back before the council as an action item. We need to think about this,” McKinney said.

The council will take action on the drought contingency plan during the Aug. 28 meeting.

By Rick Abasta

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