

Talking Points for Press and Letter Writing

11/29/04

- The Texas Hill Country is a national treasure to be enjoyed by all. It is vitally important for the economic, environmental and public health of this region that steps be taken to preserve water resources, rangeland, natural areas and the character of our communities by diligently planning for the Hill Country's growth and development.
- There is currently not enough public awareness about the danger the Hill Country is in because of water service pipelines the LCRA is forcing in western Travis County. All of this area's natural resources including rivers, creeks, Lake Travis and the Highland Lakes, wildlife habitat, recreational facilities, scenic beauty and most importantly, our drinking water supply are currently being threatened.
- On December 7th, the LCRA will consider a contract to supply water to a few developers along Hamilton Pool Road. Much like the controversial Hwy 290 surface water lines, this is not an isolated project. It is a piece of the "master plan" being aggressively marketed by LCRA staff.
- This contract does not service any existing homeowners as promoted last summer. Many homeowners actively supported the water line thinking they would receive water. Currently, existing homes will have to pay \$10,000 each with 80% of the homes in the subdivisions agreeing to sign up for water. Once they received this information, the mood of existing homeowners has changed. Many feel as if LCRA misled them to receive support for the waterline.
- According to LCRA's legal staff, the LCRA is under no legal obligation to proceed with this contract at this time.
- A preliminary financial analysis shows this to be an extremely risky venture with very little opportunity to generate revenue. Many believe ratepayers up and down the river will ultimately pay for this. This is a huge story that hasn't been told.
- The LCRA is expanding into the water retail business with speculative investments. Paul Thornhill has stated the reason is to create a monopoly for LCRA's water business. LCRA needs a monopoly because they are the most expensive provider and the provider of last resort to developers because of their doubled costs. So far, there are a lot of problems in the retail water division of LCRA. Shouldn't those issues be resolved before expanding this division? Consider the current situation with Lometa and Sunset Beach.

- Currently there are at least four-water quality and environmental planning processes in progress for this area that LCRA is funding. What is the point of these programs if the LCRA forges ahead without their input?
- Shouldn't a plan be integrated and cohesive? Why is the LCRA forcing a fragmented system of planning processes with rigid structures? What is the LCRA going to do with the information provided by these planning processes? Once they are through shouldn't an implementation effort be coordinated?
- The LCRA's Non-Point Ordinance is currently under review. Staff has indicated that it was never intended to be effective with dense suburban style developments such as Rocky Creek, the cornerstone of the HPR line.
- LCRA legal staff has advised us that while the LCRA currently doesn't impose the NPS ordinance in the Hamilton Pool area, they do have the legal authority to impose NPS rules throughout its 10 county jurisdiction. Curiously, staff believes that the LCRA board will never consider expanding the authority of the NPS rules.
- The LCRA continually reports that they do not have land use authority. Is the general public aware of the fact that when you supply water to an environmentally sensitive area that is naturally restricted from development because of terrain and limited ground water resources, you are altering the use of the land therefore imposing land use authority?
- Extending water infrastructure opens the door to rapid development and urban sprawl. The responsibility to protect natural resources automatically comes with this proposal however the LCRA is not being held accountable.
- Population projections used by the LCRA are based the assumption that water will be readily available. These projections should be evaluated carefully. Also, population projections need to be looked at in smaller more detailed areas. While growth in Travis County will be astounding, housing needs should follow transportation corridors and employment opportunities, which are expanding North, South and East.
- The LCRA likes to say that they will be the best possible stewards of the land and that if they don't supply water infrastructure, someone else will. If NPS and County water ordinances are adequate then it won't matter who supplies the water. And, who's to say that another supplier won't be environmentally sensitive and more cost effective. A rainwater provider certainly would be.

- After months and sometimes years of quiet negotiations the LCRA can issue a “letter of intent” to supply water, such as the case with Rocky Creek. Although the letter of intent is pending board approval, the county treats it as a firm commitment for water service allowing the development plans to pass preliminary approval, grand fathering in the development with the County.
- No letters of intent should be provided to developers. Water commitments should be made when water is readily available. Otherwise, the LCRA can simply create their own demand by pushing developers along to a point where they are financially committed and as LCRA say’s “caught between a rock and a hard place.”
- Why are the needs of a single developer more important than the common good?
- There is not adequate planning in place regarding wastewater management in this region. The LCRA is using staggering growth projections to promote this “strategic investment”, however there is no plan for wastewater? This is a huge concern that has barely been addressed. Rocky Creek is proposing a spray irrigation system for sewage. This should be prohibited.

Conclusion:

It is reasonable to demand that all future growth in the Hill Country be responsible and carefully planned. The LCRA should be the leader in an effort to plan for the sustainability of our sensitive water shed, but instead, they are undermining what little planning efforts are currently in place. This “strategic investment” plan will carelessly and irresponsibly squander our most precious resource, water. What is the true motivation here? There is absolutely no justification for approving the Hamilton Pool Road water line, the CCN or the master plan at this time.