

Council nearing water plan vote

Dallas likely to approve keeping East Texas reservoir option open

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By JIM GETZ / The Dallas Morning News

The Dallas City Council is poised to vote next week in favor of staff recommendations on a 55-year water plan — a plan that includes exploring new reservoirs that would flood land in East Texas.

The sense of the council came after a 3 ½ -hour briefing session Wednesday. It appears that eight members favor remaining flexible and keeping options for new reservoirs open for Dallas Water Utilities, whose number of customers in the region is projected to double by 2060.

"Our first obligation is to the citizens of Dallas," said Deputy Mayor Pro Tem Don Hill. "There are too many people who depend on us, depend on the region for jobs."

Seven council members appear to agree with environmentalists that existing reservoirs in Texas provide more than enough water for future needs. Besides believing that taking East Texans' land is unnecessary, they said, existing options were not made a priority.

"That's a million more acre-feet than what we say we're going to need," council member Bill Blaydes said. "So where's the argument?"

Even some who favor keeping options open want further emphasis on conservation, water recycling and use of existing reservoirs and consideration of new reservoirs made as a last resort. Wednesday's session, like other public meetings on the topic, was attended by East Texas residents whose farms and ranches could disappear under the proposed 72,000-acre Marvin Nichols reservoir.

"In a word, we feel angry," said state Rep. Stephen Frost, D-New Boston. "We do feel we are the financial means by which this project will happen."

And council members on both sides were troubled that city staff revealed Wednesday that some of their cost estimates for obtaining water from existing reservoirs were in error. Among them was Mayor Laura Miller, an opponent of new reservoirs.

"I don't trust the process," she said. "There is a whiff of desperation about the process." The council must vote by Wednesday so that its choices are submitted to a state-mandated regional water plan by mid-month. Water projects must be consistent with regional and state plans to obtain state permits and funding.

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