

The La Plata/ Archuleta Water District board of directors is approving two policy resolutions to address primary concerns of district residents at community meetings during the summer.

The board has already approved a resolution that any future property taxes paid by residents who don't get water service for several years will become a credit on the tap fee once water lines get to them, board president Dick Lunceford told the La Plata County Commissioners Tuesday.

The second resolution, which he expected would be approved Thursday, is a commitment that tap fees paid by subdivision residents within the district will go to the cost of extending water lines into their subdivision rather than into general system construction, Lunceford said.

He advised that the board is delaying an election to authorize a district property tax until May 2010 instead of this November. The support isn't there yet, he said.

These changes were made in response to comments at community meetings in Ignacio, Bayfield, and Oxford in the past couple months, Lunceford said. The resolutions are intended to improve voter support for a property tax.

Also since the community meetings, he said the board has confirmed two primary water sources for the district – from Vallecito to serve the part of the district within the Pine River Irrigation District service area, and from the Animas/ La Plata Project Lake Nighthorse, to serve the Florida Mesa part of the district.

Amy Kraft from Harris Water Engineering described the preferred options. She said LAPLAWD representatives have contacted the Bayfield town manager to propose a new joint water treatment plant and some shared transmission lines with the town, using Vallecito project water.

Harris Water Engineering will write a proposal on that, she said. "Bayfield in the next couple years will be at 80 percent of their plant capacity," she said.

For the A/LP water, the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) has an option to buy up to 5,000 acre feet. The LAPLAWD board has written a letter to CWCB asking them to exercise that option, Kraft said. LAPLAWD would then buy the water from CWCB.

According to a June 10 memo from Steve Harris to Lunceford, the cost for the A/LP water was projected to be a one-time cost of \$2,500 to \$3,500 per acre foot, plus annual operation and maintenance charges.

Harris recommended that the district secure a maximum 900 AF to meet demand in 2030, and at least 2,300 AF to meet demand in 2060. About half the demand will be served from each source, he said.

Kraft said that while the Vallecito water theoretically will serve customers within PRID's service area and the A/LP water will serve customers to the west, the distribution system will be linked.

Harris Water Engineering (which has been involved with PRID efforts to build a rural water system since the mid 1990s) is doing the system master plan, Kraft said.

She hopes to have it done by December. It will be used to seek grants from CWCB and to go through federal and state permit processes and the county land use process.

County attorney Sheryl Rogers noted the county commissioners are considering adopting state "1041 powers," which give the county more say over large utility projects such as this. She also noted the district will have to deal with right of way issues along county and Southern Ute roads.

"We have right of way issues with the tribe every month," Rogers said. "We are trying to improve dialogue with them on mutual issues."

Also on Tuesday, the commissioners retroactively approved a letter already sent by the county to CWCB supporting a \$400,000 grant application. The money will be used to continue planning and engineering, Lunceford said. He expects a decision on the grant award within the week.

LAPLAWD has no revenue source other than grants until eligible district voters approve a property tax. The earliest it could get property tax revenue is 2011 if voters approve the tax next May.

“We think we can make good use of the time to build a base of support for the election,” Lunceford said. District assessed valuation is now just over \$1 billion, so a 5 mill property tax would bring in around \$5 million a year, he said.

The district service plan approved by the county commissioners in October 2007 projected total system construction costs at \$85 million.

The water district service area (minus excluded properties, subdivisions with their own water systems, and potential service areas claimed by Bayfield and Ignacio) goes south to the state line, east to the Archuleta County line, west to the Animas River, and a looping area north of Highway 160.